



LOVE DREW HER TO ONE MAN.
DESIRE BOUND HER TO ANOTHER.

Jacques Latour was all that beautiful young Angelique admired in a man—courageous, idealistic, unselfish. Willingly she gave herself to this gallant revolutionary, and asked nothing in return but his happiness.

Richard Lansing was all that Angelique detested—arrogant, hard, cruel in his strength as he callously took her by force. Yet it was this English aristocrat whom she was forced to marry—and it was he who taught her the ecstasy of passion and how powerful were her own fierce hungers.

Sweeping from the violence of the French Revolution in a Paris conquered by howling mobs... to the splendor of a magnificent French chateau and the enchantment of a vast English estate... to the promise and peril of wilderness America... this is the blazing saga of a woman torn between two kinds of love, seeking her destiny in a world born anew.

SO WILD A HEART

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SO WILD A HEART

VERONICA JASON

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NOVEL



*Her desires flamed
past all boundaries
in the whirlwind of
a world in revolution*

SO WILD A HEART

VERONICA
JASON

Author of NEVER CALL IT LOVE

THIS MAN HAD KILLED HER BROTHER.

**WHAT HE WAS DOING TO HER NOW WAS
EVEN WORSE.**

The first time Angelique had seen Richard Lansing, he was astride his magnificent stallion, riding roughshod over the French countryside, and brutally smashing her brother to the ground.

Now, years later, she was face to face with Richard Lansing in the room he had rented in the Paris wine-shop where she had found work.

Now his hands were on her gown, stripping it from her body, leaving her naked to his gaze.

Now his mouth was savage against hers as he moved her toward the bed . . . toward a surrender she could not avoid . . . toward a pleasure more terrifying than her pain. . . .

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VERONICA JASON



A SIGNET BOOK
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TIMES MIRROR

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IN A SENSE, he ravished her long before he even touched her. One moment she had been bending from the waist in the sun-flooded field, left hand grasping stalks of ripe wheat, right hand holding the sickle. She had been aware of her half-brother Claude nearby, singing one of his strange little songs—the words senseless but the tune clear and sweet—as he wielded his own sickle. Otherwise she had been conscious of nothing except near-noonday heat striking through her blouse, and near-noonday hunger rumbling in her stomach, which had been without food since the family's sunrise breakfast of boiled potatoes and bread.

Then suddenly the black horse and its rider were upon her, soaring over the field's stone wall, blotting out the sun—blotting out, too, although she did not know that then, whatever future a family like hers could have.

Even as she flung herself to one side in the tall wheat, she screamed, "Claude! Watch out!" She caught a swift impression of the rider, dark-haired and hawk-nosed, with the sun glistening on tall black boots which, like his brown coat and breeches, had a foreign look. She saw him lean forward in the saddle, saw his arm shoot out as if to clear something or someone from his path. Then he was gone, the muffled sound of his mount's galloping hooves fading to silence across the field—a field which, five months earlier, the Dubois family had planted with the hope that this harvest, the harvest of 1788, would be different. This year, they'd hoped, neither hail nor drought nor huntsmen from the château would harm the wheat.

She lay there for a moment thinking: I should have been on guard. After all, she'd had warning. A few minutes earlier a stag had broken from the forest behind the field, leaped the stone wall, and, eyes bulging with terror, raced away through

the wheat. She had been resignedly sure that one or more huntsmen would appear. But at least a hundred feet had separated her and Claude from the spot where the animal had leaped the wall. She had expected his pursuer to take the same path.

Shakily she got to her feet. "Claude?" She could not see him, but a few feet away there was a depression in the wheat. Mouth already dry with fear, she moved swiftly through the waist-high grain.

He lay motionless on his back, the sickle still in his hand. His eyes, almost as dark as his coarse black hair, were open. Usually, though, they had the happy clarity of a four-year-old's. Now they looked dazed and clouded. She dropped to her knees beside him. "Claude!" When he didn't answer, she thrust her hand inside his coarsely woven blouse. Although still sweat-coated from the day's heat and his own exertions, his skin had a clammy feel. His heartbeats, though regular, seemed to her alarmingly faint.

He must not lie there with the sun beating down. She could not move him, though. At sixteen, more than a year younger than herself, he was already as tall as his father. She must get her parents' help.

Leaving her sickle beside him, she got to her feet and began to run through the wheat, blue eyes wide with anxiety in her classically featured face. Except that her skin had a golden color because of fourteen-hour days in the sun, her face appeared utterly incongruous with the dark blue peasant kerchief binding her pale yellow hair, the peasant skirt hiked up at the waist so that her slender legs were bare to midway of her thighs.

She had recognized the horseman. Only last week she had seen him riding through the nearby village of St. Isidore in one of the Château de Rhoulac coaches. A few moments later, in the village bake shop, she had asked about him.

"The Englishman?" the plump baker had said. "His name is Richard Lansing, and he's a guest of Monsier le Duc. They say that his father is some sort of titled person. A baronet, I think they said."

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-nine or thirty, thereabouts."

When the baker did not go on, Angélique had asked, feeling

color in her cheeks, "Do you know anything more about him?"

While her face grew even warmer, the baker had regarded her with shrewd little eyes. Then he said, "I know only that the likes of you had best not start bringing yourself to the attention of the likes of him, not unless you . . ."

He broke off, but she'd known he'd been about to say, ". . . Not unless you want to end up like your mother, wedding one man when you're already big with another man's get."

Now, as she ran through the wheat, she realized with shame that the baker had been right about her. That day he *had* aroused her interest, this Englishman who had turned out to be a man who could knock a young boy down and then ride off without a backward glance.

Her kerchief flew from her head, allowing her pale silky hair to stream down her back. She did not stop for it but ran on, heart filled with fear not only for her brother but also for his father and for the dark-haired, sturdy-bodied woman who had given life to both her and Claude.

In the one-room house, plus a loft, which she shared with her husband and daughter and son, Marie Dubois bent over the pot hanging above the flames in the low stone fireplace. From beyond a rough partition she could hear her husband, Simon, in the lean-to, sharpening the scythe with which he had cut hay in Monsieur le Duc de Rhoulac's field all that morning. The metal held against the turning stone wheel gave off ear-splitting screams. It never occurred to Marie to find the noise irritating. It was just a part of life, like the flies swarming in through the door she had opened on this sweltering day.

And yet, for another reason, the sound from the lean-to did oppress her. It was to help pay off last quarter's rent to Monsieur that Simon had been scything the château hayfield. Thus the sound was a galling reminder that the Dubois family, who once owned the few acres they worked, were now only tenants.

Shrugging the thought away, she stirred the potatoes in the pot. Heavy-shouldered and short-legged like her husband, Marie appeared to be close to fifty, and was actually thirty-four. Pray the good God, she thought, that Monsieur le Duc

would not require Simon's services in the hayfield much longer, leaving only her and Claude and Angelique to carry on the harvest.

Still, her family was luckier than many. Claude was a good worker. Even if his mind was a young child's, his body was that of a man. And Angelique, for all her small-boned slenderness, was a good harvester too, with quick hands and a supple body that could bend at the waist for hours.

Angelique. As always at thought of the girl, Marie felt a faint unease. The truth was that although she loved her daughter, she was in awe of her too. It was not just because of Angelique's beauty. It was the way the girl carried her head, and the things she said, things that showed how different her thoughts were from those that moved slowly through Marie's own mind.

Memories of the past seldom mingled with those slow thoughts, mainly thoughts about work and food and debt. But today, perhaps because of the September heat, she found herself remembering that September of eighteen years before, when Angelique had been conceived.

At that time Marie already had been betrothed to Simon Dubois, even though the banns had not been posted as yet. Marie's parents, Jean and Lisette Leblanc, were content with the match. Small landholders themselves, they were pleased that Simon and his widowed mother also owned their acres. Marie too was content. She liked Simon, and very much enjoyed their amorous scufflings in the fields and woods and in the straw of her parents' stable. She resisted, though, his attempts to impregnate her. They had agreed to marry in May, after the spring plowing. Simon would just have to wait until then.

On an especially hot afternoon that September, Marie was in the oak forest adjoining her family's land, gathering firewood from the ground. The forest belonged to the château. Any peasant caught chopping down a tree or even severing a limb would suffer both imprisonment and whipping. But under manorial law, peasants who paid Monsieur le Duc either rent or taxes were entitled to gather up fallen wood. Marie's family used the wood not only in their fireplace but also for sale in the village.

She added several sticks to the big leather bag beside her on the ground and then straightened up. At that moment she

saw him, riding on a sleek gray mare into the little clearing where she stood. At first she felt only awed admiration of his appearance—the yellow hair caught at the back of his head with a black velvet ribbon, the blue eyes a shade lighter than the coat he wore, the face which was so handsome it could be called beautiful.

Smiling, he reined in beside her. Now she felt an odd mingling of fear and excitement. She would be far from the first peasant girl who, caught alone in a field or wood, had been tumbled and raped by a man of his class.

He said pleasantly, "Good day."

She dropped a clumsy curtsy. "Good day, monsieur."

"What is your name?"

"Marie Leblanc, monsieur."

"Do you know my name?"

"Of course. You are Monsieur Phillipe de Rhoulac, son of Monsieur le Duc."

"That's right. Are your people tenants of my father's?"

"We are freeholders, monsieur." It gave her satisfaction to say that, even though taxes and various fees collected by Monsieur le Duc amounted to almost as much as the rent paid by his tenant farmers.

He said nothing for a moment, just let his blue, smiling gaze drop from her coarsely pretty face and sweep down her stocky young body. Her heart began to hammer.

He said, still smiling. "Perhaps we shall see each other again," and rode away through the trees. Dazed, filled with an emotion she could not name because she had never felt it before, she stood there for a moment and then resumed her work. About an hour later, still feeling dazed, and with the leather bag hung by its two loops over her shoulders to dangle down her back, she went across wheat fields dyed reddish by sunset light to her parents' house.

At supper that night—the sort of hearty meal some peasants of the district had in those days, a ragout of rabbit and potatoes and onions—Marie sat at the rough rectangular table with her parents and her three brothers, one of them older than herself. Her father said, "Tomorrow, Marie, you had best help in the fields."

"No! Please, Papa." Phillipe de Rhoulac would ride into the woods again tomorrow. She was almost certain of it.

Lisette Leblanc, a woman several inches taller than her husband, said sharply, "You will do as your father says."

"But, Mama! There are gnats in the wheat. They sting me." Thank God her whole family knew that to be true. She was one of those unfortunates especially attractive to winged insects.

Perhaps because she was the only girl, Jean Leblanc had always been less harsh with her than with his other children. "All right, daughter. We can get along without you in the fields."

"You spoil her," her mother said.

"Now, wife! We don't want her to let young Simon cool off, do we? She's not going to want to wrestle in the hay, not if she's gnat-bitten."

Her brothers snickered. As was expected of her, Marie ducked her head and gave an embarrassed-looking smile.

At almost the same hour the next day, as she gathered wood in the clearing, she heard muffled hoofbeats. She stood up. Heart beating fast, she watched Phillipe de Rhoulac ride toward her.

He checked his mount. "So we meet again."

This time she did not curtsy. "Yes, monsieur."

With that smile of his, he regarded her silently for a moment. Then he asked, "Have you a husband?"

"No."

"Are you betrothed?"

She hesitated. "The banns have not been posted."

"Are you a maiden?"

"Yes."

His smiling expression did not change. "Well, good day," he said finally, and rode out of the clearing.

She looked after him, wild protest in her heart. Why had he left? Because she had said she was betrothed? Surely not. What was a peasant betrothal to a man of his class? Had he left because she had told him she was a maiden? That seemed even less likely. Virginity should have made her more attractive to him.

The next day when he checked the gray horse beside her in the clearing, he had said nothing at all for perhaps half a minute. Then he asked, "Will you kiss me?"

Unable to speak, she nodded. He leaned over in the saddle, caught her under the elbows, and lifted her a few inches from

the ground. His warm mouth, pressed against her mouth, sent a tingling sensation all through her. Then, smiling, he set her down, said, "Good day," and rode off.

By the time he rode into the clearing the next day, she was so much dry tinder, awaiting only his touch to burst into flame. He must have been aware of that. In fact, she could see practiced appraisal in his eyes as he looked down at her.

He dismounted, tied the reins to a sapling. Hand catching Marie's, he led her to a mossy patch beneath an oak tree.

Perhaps all those amorous romps with Simon had left her a demivirgin. Whatever the reason, she felt only a brief sharp pain as he entered her. Seconds later she found that his thrust and withdrawal, thrust and withdrawal, brought her an overmounting hunger. Skirts high above her waist, sturdy legs locked around him to urge him to thrust even deeper, she at last felt a pleasure so intense it was almost a torment. She cried out. Then downward from the core of her ran the long delicious shudders.

Dimly she was aware that he had rolled away from her. She lay there, eyes closed, too languid even to adjust her tumbled skirts. It was he who smoothed them down over her legs. She opened her eyes. He lay beside her, cheek resting against his elbow-propped palm, face rather pale now, but smiling.

She said, "Why did you . . . why did you wait until to-day?"

His smile broadened. "Because rape does not interest me. For my taste, the more willing a girl is, the better." He added, "I must go now. But will you be here tomorrow?"

"Yes," Marie said. "Oh, yes!"

They met a half-dozen more times in the small clearing. Sometimes he stayed with her only a quarter of an hour or so. Other times their lovemaking was more prolonged and more varied. At his direction, she willingly performed with hands and lips services of a sort which, she felt sure, it would never occur to Simon to ask of her.

Each time she welcomed him with eagerness, and each time watched, regretfully and yet with anticipation of their next tryst, as he rode off, with the sunlight filtering through the trees to lie on his yellow hair and his coat of fine broadcloth. She had too much peasant wisdom to fancy for a moment that she could hold him for long. That was why her

desire was so avid. When this brief season of delight was over, all she would have ahead of her would be long years of sleeping in Simon's bed, working beside him in the fields, and bearing his children, until she was as worn-looking as her mother was now.

It was on a hot and lowering afternoon, with a smell of rain in the air, that they lay for the last time beneath the oak tree. When their lovemaking was over, he rolled away from her and looked up through the leafy branches. He said, "I am going away tomorrow." His voice sounded abstracted, as if in his thoughts he had already left.

She asked in a flat voice, "Where?"

"To Lyon. My regiment is there. Later perhaps to Holland. It seems we may soon be at war with the Dutch."

She had no idea where Lyon was, or Holland. But even the peasants of the district knew that the de Rhoulacs were *noblesse d'épée*, or nobility of the sword, who in exchange for their lands and titles were obliged to perform military service for King Louis.

Standing now, he adjusted the laces of his fawn-colored breeches and then reached down to draw her to her feet. "I have something for you," he said. Reaching inside his coat, he brought out a small chamois-skin bag and pressed it into her hand. "Call it a wedding gift."

"How long will you be gone?"

He seemed a little surprised by the question. "A year at least. Even if there is no war, I owe that much military service."

He kissed her then and rode away through the trees.

After a moment she opened the chamois bag and spilled three golden louis into her palm. She and Simon could buy a new plowhorse with that, and maybe an ox as well. She restored the coins to the bag and thrust it down the front of her blouse. She was too practical not to appreciate the money, but it did little to make her feel less dreary.

Probably she would never see him again, at least not close enough to touch him. And even if she did, everything would be changed. A year from now she would be living with Simon and his mother on the Dubois farm. Probably she would be big with Simon's child. . . .

She picked up the bag of firewood. With rain coming on, it would be best for her to hurry home and help her brothers

finish harvesting the family's small field of hay before the rain spoiled it.

As she walked across the wheat field, golden louis weighting the front of her blouse and firewood weighting her back, the first drops of rain fell.



MARIE HAD PICTURED how, a year in the future, she probably would be carrying Simon's child. But she soon learned that her first child—hers, but not Simon's—would be born sooner than that.

About two months after she had said good-bye to Phillipe de Rhoulac that lowering afternoon, she realized she must be pregnant. The knowledge did not trouble her greatly. If she handled the situation wisely, Simon would not blame her. She was far from being the first peasant girl of the district made pregnant by a titled gentleman. And no matter what resentment Simon might feel, what could he do about it? Appeal to the law, when the judge of the district had been appointed by Monsieur le Duc, Phillippe's father? Follow Phillipe to wherever he had gone, and try to kill him? Peasants who lifted murderous hands against noblemen died slow and highly unpleasant deaths.

No, Simon would marry her because it would still be a good match, and because he fancied her as a bedfellow. The marriage would have to take place sooner than they had planned, that was all.

On a chill day in late November she walked a mile down the narrow road, lined with now-leafless poplars, to the house Simon shared with his mother. She found him mending the roof of the lean-to shed that in those days sheltered a cow and an aged plowhorse. He descended a ladder to the ground. Together they walked a few hundred feet down the road to where a humpbacked bridge spanned a stream. While they

leaned against the stone parapet, she told him that in about seven months she would bear Phillipe de Rhoulac's child.

Simon's square, blunt-featured face had turned white. She had not known that Simon—awkward, sometimes buffoonish Simon—was capable of the anger she saw blazing in his eyes.

"He forced you?"

"Yes." She had decided upon the lie beforehand. But even if she had not, his expression now would have made her afraid to tell the truth.

For more than a minute he looked down at the shallow stream, where dead brown oak leaves floated, edges curled inward. Then he turned to her. "We must ask the priest to have the banns posted next Sunday."

"Yes, Simon."

"Do your father and mother and your brothers know about de Rhoulac?"

"No. They don't even know that I am breeding."

"Then don't tell them about de Rhoulac! Ever! Don't tell anyone! Let them all think the child is mine."

"But, Simon! No one would think the less of—"

"I mean it! I am not going to have others knowing that a man put horns on me before I was even wed, no matter who the man is."

"All right, Simon. No one will ever know the child is not yours." His pride, like his anger, surprised her. It also gave her a new respect for him.

By the time the village priest had read the banns for the required three Sundays in a row, Marie's waist had begun to thicken. No one, not even her family, felt dismayed. The couple were to be wed, weren't they? What matter if two lusty young people had been unable to wait for the priest's blessing?

On a bright, cold December day they were married in the village church. Despite the season of the year, the entire wedding party made the traditional walk to the bride's house, with a drummer and a piper in the lead. The jests that flew back and forth among the marchers were different, but no coarser, than they would have been if the bride were presumed to be a maiden.

They had almost reached the bride's house, where a roasted boar and a cask of wine awaited them, when a carriage approached from the opposite direction, the shod hooves of

the horses ringing out on the frozen road. As the carriage passed, Marie saw a nobleman's crest on the door, and recognized the lone passenger as Phillipe's sister, Therese. On the occasion four years earlier of his daughter's marriage to the Marquis de Belleau, Monsieur le Duc had bestowed two francs upon every household on his manor, no matter whether they were tenants or freeholders.

Excited by the attention paid to her on this once-in-a-lifetime occasion, her wedding day, Marie felt only a little disturbed by the sight of Phillipe's blond and beautiful sister. She found the marquise's behavior strange, though. Usually even the haughtiest aristocrat, when passing a peasant wedding party, would smile, or even throw coins. The marquise, though, stared straight ahead, her chiseled features pale.

Less than two weeks later, Marie learned the probable reason for the marquise's behavior. Phillipe, Monsieur le Duc's only child besides Therese, was dead. During military maneuvers his mount had reared and then toppled backward, crushing him to death. The marquise must have been on her way from her own distant château to grieve with her father when she passed the singing, shouting marchers.

Marie felt only a fleeting pang at the news. After all, months ago she had realized that Phillipe never again would be a part of her life. Besides, although she had liked him well enough, she had never allowed herself to feel tenderness for him, but only a feverish, uncomplicated lust, because what good would it have done for her to feel tenderness?

And now, even if her earthy temperament had inclined her to sigh over the past, she would have had little leisure to do so. Adjusting to life as Simon's wife occupied all her waking hours. She had to learn to perform household tasks according to the desires of her mother-in-law, a grim woman of almost sixty who had no intention of handing over authority to the girl that Simon—her youngest child and only son—had married. While the elder Madame Dubois sat and knitted, Marie cleaned pots with lye and wood ashes, plumped up the maize-husk mattress on the bed she and Simon shared in the loft, and the goose-feathered mattress on her mother-in-law's bed close to the fireplace. When April came, Marie spelled Simon at following the plow across the muddy fields, even though by then her body was swollen and her movements

awkward. Whenever some reminder brought Phillipe briefly into her thoughts, he seemed like a figure from a barely remembered dream. As for her unborn child, Marie had almost forgotten that it was not Simon's.

That was why the first sight of her daughter, born on an abnormally cool night in early June, so astonished her. With her mother-in-law acting as midwife, while her husband waited somewhere outside in the darkness, Marie gave birth in the bed close to the fireplace. Like most first births, it was not easy. Afterward she fell into exhausted sleep. When she awoke, flickering firelight showed that Madame Dubois was bending over the cradle beside the bed. She straightened and looked at Marie.

"So you're awake, are you?" She lifted the child, wrapped in a brown knit shawl, and laid it beside Marie. "A girl," she said shortly. A peasant family needed sons much more than daughters.

With awkward but careful fingers, Marie pushed the shawl back from the small head. Unlike other newborn babies Marie had seen, this child was neither bald nor red-faced. Wisps of yellow hair gleamed in the firelight. The tiny face and waving fists had the color of apple blossoms, white touched with rose. The eyes were shut, but Marie, remembering a face close above hers in the oak tree's shade, knew that the baby's eyes must be blue.

She looked up to see that her mother-in-law's face held a knowing smile. Then the older woman shrugged. "Simon hasn't seen the child yet. I told him it was best to wait outside until you'd had some rest. But I'll tell him you're awake now."

He came in and stood beside the bed. A bit apprehensive, she looked up and saw startled awe in his face. It gave way to anger. Then slowly the awed look, a kind of admiring wonder, came back into his face. He touched one of the tiny waving hands, and smiled as it curled around his forefinger.

Marie felt relief. "What shall we name her?"

He shook his head. "I had not thought of any names."

She said, after a long hesitation, "I wondered about Angelique."

Finally he nodded. Evidently he, too, thought it would not be right to give this fairy-changingling of a child the sort of

name peasants usually bestowed upon girl children—Marie, say, or Jeanne.

He said, "We will christen her Angelique."

Although he continued to look at the child with a certain awe in his eyes, Marie could tell that he was fond of her, too. He played with her now and then, and seldom complained when Angelique, lying in her cradle beside the bed in the loft, awoke him with her crying. Nevertheless, Marie was glad when, the following November, she found that again she was pregnant. Now Simon would have a child of his own loins. And, pray God, it would be a boy.

It was a boy, a fine, sturdy one whom they christened Claude. He was a remarkably placid child, seldom crying or making any other sort of fuss. What was more, he looked like Simon, with dark eyes and hair, and a body which, even in infancy, gave promise of growing into Simon's stocky, powerful-shouldered shape.

Simon continued to show fondness for Angelique, but it was obvious that he loved Claude, with an intensity which Marie had never seen any other man display toward his offspring. When he came in from the fields for noon dinner or at the end of the day, he would go immediately to the cradle and, if Claude was awake, lift the placid baby into his arms. If Claude was asleep, Simon would stand looking down at him before turning to the food which awaited him on the table.

Angelique was four and Claude not quite three when Simon's mother died. Marie did not pretend to herself that she felt grief. She and her mother-in-law had never developed any affection for each other. But she sympathized with her husband's sorrow.

Within a year it became indisputably clear that she and Simon had another cause for sorrow. There was something wrong with Claude. Before she was a year old, Angelique had been able to speak. By the time she was two she prattled almost incessantly. But Claude was well past the age of two before he spoke at all. And even at the age of almost five he could string only two or three words together.

One night as they lay in the bed beside the banked fire, Simon said, "It won't matter." He kept his voice low lest it reach the children, asleep in their parents' former bed in the loft.

"What won't?" Marie asked, even though, remembering the sadness in his eyes as he looked at his son across the supper table that night, she had guessed what he meant.

"Claude's being simple. What a farmer needs is a strong and willing back. He will have that."

"Yes, that's true."

She wanted to add, "And surely we will have more sons." But she did not say it, because that was something she and Simon had ceased to talk about. Instead she reached down beneath the bedclothes and tried to stroke him into desire. She almost never made sexual overtures to him. One reason was that she had never felt greatly aroused by his body, not even in their courting days. The second reason was that she knew how tired he was—how tired they both were—from long days in the fields. Best to let him choose the time of their couplings.

But tonight she somehow had a sense that she might conceive. Therefore her wooing hand persisted. And when, aroused, he turned to her, she tried to respond as fully as she could, hoping that her own desire would make her body more receptive to his seed.

That hope came to nothing. Year after year passed, and still there were only two children in the house, the beautiful girl with the intelligent eyes, and the boy, more than a year her junior, who already was taller and heavier than she. In fact, as early as his tenth year he could accomplish almost as much work in the fields as a man.

One night when Angelique was almost twelve she finished placing bowls on the table and then walked over to the fireplace, where Marie was tending a pot of wild pigeon, bought by Simon in the village the day before, combined with potatoes and carrots.

"Mama, Papa isn't my real father, is he?"

Seated on a three-legged stool beside the fire, Marie looked up at her daughter. She'd been expecting Angelique to ask that question sooner or later. Ever since her daughter was a small child, Marie had known that others must be commenting on the unlikelihood of two dark, thickset people producing a girl like Angelique. No one, though, not even members of her own family, had said anything like that to her and Simon. Perhaps it was because they sensed, under Simon's good-natured exterior, the rage of which he was capable, the

rage she had seen blazing in his eyes the day she had told him that she was pregnant by Phillipe de Rhoulac.

Marie said to her daughter, "Why do you ask a question like that?"

"Because I don't look like you and Papa and Claude. And because at the fair some girls were . . . saying things loud enough for me to hear." She meant the May Day fair, held in the village square only the week before, with the young boys and girls dancing around the maypole, and traveling jugglers and bear leaders coaxing centimes from the crowd.

"What sort of things?"

"That someone else must have been my papa."

"Did they . . . mention names?"

"No."

Marie was not surprised to learn that Phillipe had not been mentioned. He had left the district many months before Angelique's birth. Now, a dozen years later, perhaps most of the local people did not even remember that Monsieur le Duc had ever had a son, and those who did remember could not recall what the son had looked like.

Marie said feebly, "Why do you pay any attention to what a pack of silly girls—"

"Please, Mama." Those clear, intelligent eyes that often made Marie uneasy looked down at her calmly but unwaveringly. "I won't blame you. I love you, Mama."

"Angelique, I promised Simon—I promised your papa . . ." She floundered to silence.

"That you would never tell anyone? But I am not just anyone. Am I not the one person, besides you and Papa, who has the right to know?" She paused and then added, "Was it someone we know now?"

"No, he's dead." She stopped and then said with a rush, "He was a gentleman. Now, don't ask me anything more. And please, Angelique! Don't let your papa know I've told you this much."

"I won't." She crouched down and hugged her mother to her, in that demonstrative way that Marie found almost embarrassing. "I love you and Papa very much. And if that . . . that other one was a gentleman, I don't want to know who he was. I don't like gentlemen."

"You don't like—"

"No! I don't like to see how Papa has to act when gentle-

men pass along the road. He pulls off his cap and bows, and makes Claude do the same, and most of the time the gentlemen only glance at them."

Why, Marie wondered, should her strange daughter mind *that*? Heavy taxes and high rents were things to mind, but a bow? Poor people had always bowed, and aristocrats, if they were of a mind to, had always ridden past with scarcely a glance, and that was the way it always would be.

Angelique stood up. "Mama, sometimes I've wondered . . ."

She broke off. Marie said, "Yes, daughter?"

"I've wondered why there is just Claude and me."

Marie sighed. "I suppose it's God's will." Her face darkened. "Or maybe the Devil's. Maybe I've been bewitched."

"Bewitched!"

"Yes! People say Granny Monet is a witch."

Granny Monet and her two grown grandsons, who lived a few miles the other side of the village of St. Isidore, were strangely fortunate. Other peasants' cows might sicken, but theirs remained healthy. Lightning struck other hay barns, but never theirs. Packs of hunters might lay waste their neighbors' fields, but the Monets' wheat and maize remained inviolate.

"Oh, Mama!" Another of those looks Marie did not quite understand, a kind of amused affection, came into Angelique's eyes. "I don't think there are any witches. Granny Money is just a mean old . . ."

Hearing Simon and Claude's footsteps outside the door, she broke off, and then bent swiftly to kiss her mother's cheek.

Now, on this scorching day more than five years later, while she waited for her husband to leave his grinding wheel and her children to come in from the field, Marie felt that not just she and Simon might be the victims of witchcraft. The whole land seemed to lie under an evil spell.

She and Simon were not the only ones who, unable to pay taxes, had forfeited their lands to the Château de Rhoulac. Her parents, too, had sunk to the status of tenants. Marie felt that it was the loss of their land which had caused them to die within months of each other. Only one of her brothers, the eldest, remained with his wife on the farm. The two others had married girls of another district and now helped work the rented lands of their parents-in-law.

"It's the prices," Marie muttered to herself.

High prices and taxes were the trouble, even more than three bad harvests in a row, and diseases that had carried off horses and cattle. And both high prices and high taxes, people said, were somehow caused by the expensive wars King Louis had been waging for years. Some said, too, that the extravagances of Louis's wife, Marie Antoinette, were to blame. Whatever the truth of the matter, one thing was certain. In order to meet those high prices, the nobles were wringing every last centime in rents and fees out of their peasants. The fee Simon paid for grinding his wheat in Monsieur le Duc's mill had tripled over the past few years.

Bad as things were in this district, Marie had heard that they were worse in others. There were stories of homeless, starving people, mouths stained green from eating grass at the roadsides. There were stories that in a few places desperate peasants had burned châteaux and slaughtered the noble inhabitants and their retainers. Punishment, of course, had been swift and merciless. All the rebels had been hung. As for the ringleaders, they had been hung, but were taken down before they died. Before their still-living eyes, their entrails had been taken out and burned. Then, with wrists and ankles attached by ropes to four horses straining in different directions, they had been torn apart.

People said that the château of the Marquis de Belleau, Monsieur le Duc's son-in-law, had been burned. The marquis had been killed with an ax, but his wife had managed to escape. She had returned now to live with her aging father, who these past dozen years had seldom left his château except for duty visits to Versailles. Aside from servants and an occasional guest, the only other occupant of the château was Monsieur le Duc's uncle, le Comte de Gascard, a man of almost eighty.

Recently Marie had caught a glimpse of Madame la Marquise in one of the château's coaches. Perhaps because of the violent scenes she had witnessed, including the slaughter of her husband, she was scarcely recognizable as the woman who had passed Marie's wedding procession that cold December day eighteen years before.

Even the great ones suffer, Marie thought, not without a certain satisfaction. Even lacking in imagination as she was,

she had a sense of something dark and terrible gathering itself to descend upon France, in much the same way that bruised-looking clouds, with lightning playing in their depths, sometimes gathered in the west to swoop down on the land, bringing rain and hail that could mean death to an entire harvest.

But for now, at least, she and Simon were well and strong, and so were Angelique and Claude. At thought of her gentle, loving son, Marie's face softened. She and Simon would never take second place to a wife in Claude's affections, nor would he ever leave them to seek a better life, as so many young men of the district had these past few years. Always he would be their very young son.

As for Angelique, there could be little doubt that she would find a husband. So far, though, her suitors were strangely scarce. The young men of the district seemed in awe of her, perhaps not just because of her beauty but also because of the spirited ways she had.

Only two young men had made it plain that they were attracted to her. One was Granny Monet's elder grandson, Marcel, a thick-lipped twenty-five-year-old who somehow managed to appear both loutish and shrewd. A few weeks ago he had asked Simon for Angelique's hand in marriage. Simon had urged Angelique to accept, citing the Monets' continued prosperity in these times of near-starvation, a prosperity which had reinforced Marie's suspicion that Granny was in league with the Devil.

Angelique had answered, "Marry Marcel Monet? I'd rather be one of those who eat grass at the roadside."

In spite of her refusal, relayed to him by Simon, Marcel must have made a direct approach to the girl and been stingingly rebuffed, because the next Sunday in church he gave Angelique one cold, sneering look and then ignored her.

Angelique's second suitor had not declared himself, except with the humid look that came into his dark blue eyes whenever he looked at the girl. He was Jacques Latour, twenty-one years old, and a distant cousin of Simon's. He was also, in the opinion of some, a renegade from the priesthood, even though he had left the monastery before the time appointed for him to take his final vows. Just leaving the monastery, Marie reflected uneasily, wouldn't have been such a black

mark against him. It was the things he kept saying about the Church, and about the rich and powerful, things that might bring him to a very bad end—

The sound of running footsteps broke in on her thoughts. She turned in time to see Angelique halt just inside the doorway.

"Oh, Mama! Something's happened . . ."

Swiftly Marie crossed the room and grasped the girl's shoulders with work-hardened hands. "Where's Claude?"

"He . . ."

More footsteps. Simon had heard the girl's cry and left the lean-to to come around the corner of the house. Pulling free of her mother's grasp, Angelique whirled around.

"Oh, Papa. It's Claude. He's hurt."

3

THEY HURRIED ACROSS the field, Angelique and Simon in the lead, Marie at a stumbling run a few feet behind them. Beneath sun-browned skin, fear had drained away the color, so that their sweating faces had a muddy look.

When they reached Claude, they saw they were too late. Even before Simon dropped to his knees and put his ear to the boy's chest, Marie and Angelique knew that he was dead. The square face with its incongruous stubble of black beard, the face that almost always had held the trusting happiness of a young child, now looked stiff and blank, like the carved wooden faces of the saints in the village church.

Simon gathered his son against his chest and rocked him silently back and forth for perhaps a minute. It wasn't until then that Angelique saw the blood seeping from the back of her brother's rough dark head. There was blood, also, on the jagged stone upon which his head had lain. With weird irrelevance she reflected how strange it was that even though this field had been worked for perhaps hundreds of years, stones

could still lurk here, ready to turn a plow's point or shatter a boy's skull.

Simon lifted a contorted face toward Angelique. "Tell me."

She spoke of the stag leaping the wall some distance away, and then the black horse and its rider blotting out the sun. She described how she had flung herself away from those descending hooves, and how, an instant later, she had seen the rider's arm shoot out and shove Claude from his path.

Simon's voice was thick. "Who was he?"

"The Englishman, the one who's staying at the château." Again she felt a stab of shame as she recalled how she had questioned the baker about Richard Lansing. Then she said, "Papa, hadn't we better take Claude home?"

It took the three of them to manage it, Simon supporting the wide shoulders and Marie and Angelique the bare sturdy legs and the feet in their wooden clogs. In the fly-infested room, they laid him on the bed near the hearth, where the potatoes still cooked in the hanging pot. Face dazed, Marie sat on a stool beside the bed. Simon stood at the bed's foot, looking down at his son.

Angelique said, "Hadn't I best fetch the priest?"

There could be no last absolution, of course, but then, she did not think her brother would have needed it. What sins could Claude have committed which would bar him from heaven? But it would be seemly to have the priest make the sign of the cross over him and say a prayer.

Marie did not answer. But Simon turned his head and said, in that strangled noise she'd never heard him use before, "Yes, fetch him."

Because she knew that none of them would want dinner, she unhooked the pot and placed it on the hearthstones. Then she went out to the field and retrieved her kerchief, the only one she had. After that she walked along the dusty road toward the village. She crossed the humpbacked bridge and, farther on, the entrance to the road that led up to the Château de Rhoulac. She could see the château on its hill, gray-stone round towers rising above the treetops. By now Richard Lansing must have either brought down his stag or abandoned the chase. Was he up there somewhere in the château, perhaps changing into satin breeches and velvet coat in preparation for the many-course dinner his class ate in midafternoon?

She reached the village with its public well set in the center of its cobblestoned square. Around the square stood a few decaying houses, a smithy, the butcher shop with nothing at all, not even a rabbit, hanging from the hooks outside it, the bake shop, the wine shop, the church, and the office of the intendant, or chief village official, a man appointed by Monsieur le Duc. Since leaving the monastery, Jacques Latour had worked as a clerk to the intendant. She wished that Jacques were here now. But a few days ago, after finishing the tax rolls, he had set out on foot for another of his fairly frequent visits to his cousin, a stonemason, in Paris.

Something, perhaps a kind of premonition, made her raise her gaze to a grim-looking stone structure built on rising ground a few hundred feet west of the village, which housed the manorial court and the prison. Then she hurried on across the cobblestones.

Just before she reached the brown frame church with its square bell tower, one half of the wide front door opened, and the priest came down the steps. Although he was old, with a stomach that bulged over the cord knotted around his brown robe, he was the "new" priest, who had served the district less than six months. Angelique liked him better than the "old" priest, a gaunt-faced man of forty who had seemed to delight in bestowing harsh penances and in describing the hellfire that would consume the souls of his flock if they poached game that belonged to Monsieur le Duc, muttered against their betters, or otherwise showed discontent with the place in life which God had ordained for them.

The fat old priest paused at sight of her. "You wish to see me, my child?"

"Yes, Father. My brother is dead."

He asked with astonishment, "Young Claude? How can that be?"

She told him.

"And you say the rider was the English gentleman who has been staying at the château? Why, I saw him not fifteen minutes ago, in a coach with Monsieur le Duc and his daughter. They said they were on their way to Versailles, where Monsieur Lansing will stay with them for a few weeks and then go home to England."

He paused, and then added, "Poor Claude! How sad that

such an accident should have happened to an innocent like him. But we must realize, my child, that it was God's will."

An accident, she thought bitterly. That was what le Duc de Rhoulac's manorial court would call it, if anyone were bold enough to bring it to the court's attention. And it behooved the priest of this district to call it an accident too.

"Will you come and give Claude a final blessing, Father?"

"Of course, my child, but there is something in the intendant's office that I must see to first. After all," he said gently, "there is no need to hurry."

No, no need to hurry. "Thank you, Father," she said, and turned away.

Evidently the priest's business did not take long, because she had gone only a few hundred yards down the road when she heard hooves plodding behind her. She turned and saw the priest, his robe hiked up above his fat white calves as he sat astride a mule. He gave her a solemn nod as he passed her.

Suddenly aware of how tired she was, Angelique slackened her pace. There would be no point in hurrying. Before she could reach the house, the priest would have said his prayer for the dead, and made the sign of the cross above her brother's still face, and started back to the village. Already the mule and its rider were invisible beyond a curve in the road.

When she reached the humpbacked bridge, she left the road and moved down to the stream. Seated on the grassy bank, she took off her clogs and immersed her slender, smarting feet in the cool water.

Grief for Claude was like an almost physical ache in her chest. Again she wished that Jacques—slender Jacques, with his warm smile and his dark blue eyes and his dark hair—were here to comfort her. He would have been a comfort to her parents also, because they both liked him, in spite of the dangerous things he said in his quiet voice.

She thought of some of those things. "I left the monastery," he had said one night at the Dubois supper table, "because the Church in France today is not, as Christ was, a friend to the humble and helpless. Instead the priests are lickspittles to the rich and powerful." Another time he said, "French taxation is an injustice that cries out to heaven. The nobles, who could afford to, pay no taxes at all. But the

peasants are taxed so mercilessly that they can put only boiled potatoes and onions on their tables, and sometimes not even that."

As she often did, Angelique wondered about his trips to Paris to see his stonemason cousin. The cousin never returned the visits. Perhaps he did not exist. Perhaps it was quite another purpose which took Jacques out of the district every now and then. She had heard talk, usually in lowered tones, of groups of men meeting throughout France to "make plans." Just what sort of plans, no one seemed to want to discuss, but Angelique had a feeling that they were the sort of plans that might lead a man to the gallows.

No! She wouldn't let herself think like that. She was fond of Jacques. Fond enough to want to marry him? Perhaps not, but fond.

Did he want to marry her? He had not said so. And yet she was certain he felt tenderness toward her. Her mother was sure of it too. In fact, her mother felt that she, Angelique, was the reason that Jacques, instead of "bettering himself," chose to remain in St. Isidore. With his education, her mother had pointed out, he could become tutor to some nobleman's children, or some rich merchant's children in Paris. With his good looks, he could even hope to marry some merchant's daughter, or widow.

"Instead he says here," her mother said, "working for the intendant for a few francs a week. Oh, he's a strange one, that Jacques."

Yes, so strange, and with such dangerous thoughts, that a girl who grew too fond of him might live to regret it. And yet she wished he were here now, so that she could talk to him about this aching grief. . . .

The plod of hooves approaching the bridge. She stood up, slipped her feet into her clogs, and climbed the bank to the road.

The priest brought the mule to a halt. "I told your mother, my child, that the burial can be next Wednesday."

"How does she seem?"

"Very quiet." He frowned, as if he felt her quietness was a disturbing sign.

"And my father?"

"He was not there."

"Not there!"

"Your mother did not know where he had gone. You had best go to her, my child." He made the sign of the cross and rode on.

Anxiety mingling with her grief, she hurried the rest of the way to the house. Just as Angelique had left her, Marie sat on the stool beside the bed. The only difference was that she had taken off her black kerchief. Her right hand, holding the kerchief, lay in her lap.

"Mama?"

Marie did not look at her. Instead she reached out with the kerchief and waved a fly away from her son's still face.

"Where did Papa go?"

Marie said in a flat voice, still not looking at her daughter, "I don't know. He just went."

Perhaps, Angelique thought, he had gone to the woods to weep out his grief. Best not to try to find him.

Then her gaze went to the table, still set with wooden bowls for the potatoes long since grown cold in the pot. She stiffened with alarm, not because of something that was on the table but because of something that was not. Always when her mother put the wooden bread platter on the table, she laid the knife beside it. The knife was gone.

"Mama! Where's the knife?"

Marie did not take her gaze from her son's face. "It's on the table."

No use in trying to talk to her mother. But where had Simon taken the knife, and why? To end his own life? Surely not. Then had he gone toward the village, and then turned left onto the road that led to the château?

No, no. If he had, surely she or the priest, coming and going between this house and the village, would have seen him.

But he might not have taken the road. He might have cut across the fields to a footpath that led up to the château's high walls.

The pulse in the hollow of her throat was pounding now. Then, with overwhelming relief she realized that Simon would not have a chance to kill the Englishman, and thus sign his own death warrant. Richard Lansing had gone with Monsieur le Duc and his daughter to Versailles.

Simon would not even be able to get inside the château. He would find soldiers at the gate. Because of peasant disorders in various parts of France, all manorial châteaux had

been granted military protection by the king. The soldiers would turn the grief-crazed man away, and he would come home.

So best not to go after him. Best to wait here with her mother. She carried a stool from the table over to the bed and sat beside the silent Marie, not touching her.

4

THE ELDER OF the two soldiers at the château's gate said, "Monsieur Lansing is not here."

Heart pounding with rage as well as from the climb up the steep path, Simon answered, "I must see him."

The younger soldier, who was about nineteen to Simon's near-forty, said, "Are you deaf, uncle? The English gentleman has left. Anyway, what business would a fellow like you have with him?"

"I have an important message. And I don't believe he has gone."

Standing guard was so dull that the young soldier seized any opportunity for diversion. He grasped his musket by its barrel and made a mock-menacing gesture with the stock. "Are you calling me a liar, old fellow?"

"He's here," Simon answered thickly. "He was here this morning, and he's here now. And I have a message for him."

"And we have a message for you. Take yourself down the hill or we'll send you down it, with this musket up your backside."

"Don't make sport of him," the other soldier said. He turned to Simon. "Monsieur Lansing has gone to Versailles, along with Monsieur le Duc and his daughter. Come into the courtyard. You will see that the big coach used for long journeys is gone."

They swung back the high wooden gates. Simon followed them into the cobblestoned courtyard, with its sheds for

coaches along one wall. It was true that the large coach was missing. But that was no proof that the Englishman had gone, or de Rhoulac either. The coach might have taken Madame la Marquise on a trip to the shops in Paris.

He stole a look at the château's entrance. On this sweltering day, one half of its elaborately carved double door stood open . . .

He whirled, darted across the courtyard. Evidently surprise held the soldiers motionless for a few seconds, because he was halfway up the broad stone steps before he heard their shouts and then their pounding feet. He plunged through the entrance. Even though the château's entrance hall seemed dim after the dazzling sunlight, he gained an impression of a marble floor, and dully gleaming shields and battleaxes on stone walls, and a wide marble staircase sweeping upward. From the corner of his eye he saw a man in livery hurrying toward him. "Hey! You, there!" the servant called, but Simon did not slacken his pace as he headed for the stairs. He'd climbed only a few steps when he heard the clatter of booted feet on the marble floor. He was well ahead of them still. They were both taller and younger than he, but they did not have his pain and rage spurring them on.

At the landing he turned left onto a thickly carpeted corridor. Surely it was on this floor, rather than higher ones, that he might find the man who had killed his son. He ran on, hoping for an open door and the sight of a tall man in an opulent room . . .

Someone coming toward him. Someone who had just emerged from an open doorway. Not a servant, not with that mincing walk, that white peruke, that satin coat and breeches gleaming faintly in the dim light. The Englishman, or Monsieur le Duc. Suddenly it did not matter to him which one it was. Both were men who would consider Claude's death a matter of less concern than a case of distemper in a favorite hound. He thrust his hand inside his blouse and pulled out the knife.

Le Comte de Gascard, uncle of le Duc de Rhoulac, saw the madman rushing toward him, eyes blazing, knife upraised. He threw up a satin-sleeved arm to try to protect his rouged old face and his chest. The knife penetrated his sleeve and even scratched his forearm. At the moment he was

not aware of his injury, but only of the sound of ripping fabric.

Then, thanks to *le bon Dieu*, the soldiers overtook the lunatic. With the stock of his musket, one of them knocked him senseless.

Even though September had given way to October, the courtroom in that grim stone building outside the village was uncomfortably warm on this, the second and final day of Simon's trial. Every bench was filled. The villagers were there, with the exception of Jacques Latour. To Angelique's keen disappointment, the priest told her of a letter Jacques had written to the intendant, saying that "family matters" were taking him and his cousin to Marseilles. But nearly every peasant of the district was there. Some, no doubt, felt pity or even rage on Simon's behalf. Others had come because, in their monotonous, hard-working lives, any novelty was welcome.

Angelique sat with her Uncle Georges, Marie's brother, and his wife. Marie had not attended either yesterday or today. When Angelique hesitantly suggested that her mother should, Marie had said in a toneless voice her daughter had grown used to these past two weeks, "Why? I know what they'll do."

The Duc de Rhoulac had not bothered to return from Versailles for the trial. As for Richard Lansing, Angelique reflected that probably he was in England by now. Perhaps he didn't even know that with one careless thrust of his arm he had ended a young boy's life. And if he did know, probably he had regarded the matter as regrettable, but not of sufficient importance to bring him back across the channel.

According to French law, manorial courts were required to supply a defense lawyer for indigent prisoners. The lawyer provided in this case, a thin, tubercular-looking young man with an ill-fitting wig, had been summoned from Paris. He took Angelique, Simon's only witness, through her story—the huntsman thrusting Claude aside so roughly that he fell, and her own wild dash to the house, and then Simon on his knees in the wheat, rocking back and forth with his dead son in his arms. The prosecuting attorney, a middle-aged man whose jowled face gave him the appearance of a bulldog, summoned the two soldiers as witnesses, and several servants who had

observed Simon's invasion of the château. The comte, described by the prosecutor as "prostrate with shock," did not appear in person. Instead the prosecutor read the aged nobleman's deposition to the almost equally aged judge on the bench.

This morning both lawyers had addressed the bench. The prosecutor had asked for the "sternest of punishment." The defense attorney, in carefully deferential tones, had pleaded for "mercy, in that the perpetrator of this atrocious crime against an aged and illustrious nobleman was perhaps not quite right in his wits."

Ten minutes ago the judge had retired to his chamber behind the courtroom to ponder his decision. Now the door near the bench opened and the judge returned to the courtroom. At the clerk's bidding everyone rose, including the prisoner in the dock, who throughout the trial had sat looking at the floor. As he stood there, his gaze was still lowered.

The judge said, "The prisoner will look at me." Then, when Simon had raised his head: "Simon Dubois, on the morning of Tuesday, October 12, you are to be taken to the gallows and hung by the neck until dead. As an example to the people of this district, the execution will take place in the village square."

Angelique felt weak with relief. So it was to be only death, and a swift one, not the drawn-out horror she had feared.

The morning of the twelfth was frosty, the first cold day of the year. Angelique stood with the silent crowd in the square and watched Simon mount the gallows. To come here with her Uncle Georges and his wife in their oxcart had cost her every ounce of her resolution. But she felt she owed it to Simon to stand here, so that in the last seconds of his life he could look out over the crowd and see the face of someone who loved him.

But he was not looking at anyone. He stood with bound arms and lowered gaze as the fat priest in his brown habit spoke words to him that she could not hear. And now the noose was around his neck, and the hangman was slipping the black hood over his head.

A gray mist closed in around her. She knew that she was falling down through it to the cobblestones, just as Simon in a few seconds would fall through the trap to his death.

When she recovered, she lay on the bed of the creaking ox-

cart, her head in her aunt's lap. Her aunt said, "So you've come around."

Angelique asked in a dull voice, "Is it over?"

"Yes. They've probably cut him down by now."

And after that, Angelique thought, staring up at the gray sky, they would take his body to a half-acre of ground beyond the village, where suicides and executed criminals were buried.

She sat up. Not turning, her uncle asked from the cart's seat, "What are you and your mother going to do now?"

"I don't know."

"One thing sure. You can't run that farm, two women alone. You couldn't raise enough to feed yourselves, let alone pay the château its rent."

Angelique said nothing.

"Your mother can come live with us because she's my sister, and because there's nothing else she can do. But we can't take both of you in. What with the young ones, the house is too small as it is." Uncle Georges had seven children, all under the age of fourteen.

"You'd better get married," Angelique's aunt said.

"How about Granny Monet's grandson Marcel?" Uncle Georges asked.

"No!" Angelique said explosively.

She thought of one day weeks before when she was walking home from the fields at sunset. Marcel had come up behind her, spun her around by the shoulders, and wrapped his arms around her, holding her close against him. She had twisted in his grasp, trying to free herself, trying to avoid the thick-lipped mouth seeking her mouth, until she realized that her struggles only excited him the more. After that she stood still, gathering saliva in her mouth. She waited until, smiling, he lowered his head to kiss her. Then she spat in his face.

With an oath he released her and stepped back, wiping his face with his sleeve. She turned and walked away. In church the next Sunday he gave her one cold, sneering look. Since then he had ignored her.

"You listen to me, my girl," her aunt said. "Marcel may not be able to read and write like Jacques Latour, and God knows he's not handsome, but he and his granny and his brother have the biggest farm in the district."

"And anyway," Uncle Georges said, "that Jacques has

ideas that will get him hung before he's anywhere near Simon's age. You'd better grab Marcel, if you can get him."

"I'd rather starve!"

Her aunt gave a humorless laugh. "Wait until you're starving. You'll find you'll do almost anything."

A few minutes later the oxcart stopped long enough for Angelique to get down, and then creaked on toward Uncle Georges's farm. Angelique went up a short path and then around the lean-to to the front of the house.

Three or four feet from the door her mother stooped above a patch of last summer's weeds, grasping the dried stalks with her left hand and sawing away at them with a sickle.

"Mama! What are you doing?"

Marie straightened. "You finish this patch of wheat," she said. "I'd better go into the house. Your father and Claude will be coming home for their dinner."

Heart twisting with anguish, Angelique took the sickle with her right hand and put her left arm around her mother's stooped shoulders. "Come inside, Mama." When they had crossed the threshold she went on, "It's not time to cook the potatoes, Mama. Why don't you just sit for a while?"

Looking confused, Marie seemed for a moment or two about to say something. Then she sank docilely on the stool beside the fireplace and folded her hands in her lap. Angelique went outside and around the corner of the house. A wooden bench Simon had made when she herself was a small child stood against the lean-to wall. She sat down and stared unseeingly straight before her. Would Uncle Georges still take her mother in, even though she might be of little use even for housework from now on? Yes, probably. After all, she was his sister.

Angelique thought: But what am *I* to do? Then, as she continued to stare straight ahead, an idea began to take shape in her mind.

She was still sitting there when a horse-drawn wagon stopped in the road. Granny Monet climbed stiffly down from the seat and then walked up the path to the bench. Uninvited, and without even pausing to say good morning, she sat down beside Angelique and looked at her with eyes that were still bright and shrewd in her heavily wrinkled face.

"Well, my girl, what are you and your mother going to do

now? One thing's sure. You'll never be able to make a living here."

"My mother will live with my Uncle Georges."

"But he won't take in the two of you, I'll wager. So I've come to you with a suggestion. Marry my grandson."

When Angelique didn't answer, the old woman's sharp gaze went over the girl's body. "God knows you don't look strong, but I've seen you at work in the fields. You're a good worker. And I think you'll give me fine great-grandsons."

Angelique repressed a shudder. She asked coldly, "Did Marcel know you were coming here?"

"He knows. We talked it over as soon as we heard Simon had been arrested. We knew it would mean hanging—or worse."

What a horrible old woman she was. Angelique said, "Did Marcel tell you about something that happened between us some weeks ago?"

"You mean when he tried to be friendly, and you spat in his face? Yes, he told me. He's willing to overlook that."

"I'm not. I'm sorry, but the answer is no."

"Girl, you're a fool! What are you going to do, eat grass?"

"I'm going to Paris."

"Paris!"

Granny Monet could not have looked more dumbfounded if Angelique had said she was going to the moon.

"Yes. As you've said, I'm young and strong. I can make a living there in a bakery, or perhaps a tavern or wine shop."

"But how are you going to get to Paris? In your own coach, perhaps? It's sixty miles away, you know."

"I'll walk, no matter how long it takes." She stood up. "Please excuse me now. I have things to do."

About ten o'clock on a bright morning three days later, Angelique was already two miles beyond the village on the road to Paris. She wore wrapped around her head and body a dark red shawl woven many years ago by her mother's mother. Over her shoulder she carried a bag made of coarse sacking. The bag held the only blouse and skirt she owned besides the dark blue cotton ones she wore. It also held a half-dozen large boiled potatoes, a long loaf of bread, and part of a wheel of cheese. She hoped she would be able to reach Paris without buying additional food. As for shelter at

night, she might be able to obtain it free in some farmhouse. If not, there were the neat stacks of hay in the fields. By making a burrow in the straw, she could keep warm if the now-mild weather turned frosty again.

She had money—five francs plus some centimes, which she had knotted in a handkerchief and thrust down the front of her blouse. It was money she did not want to spend on the journey, though. She might need it badly in Paris if she did not find work right away.

The money was free from the sale of the Dubois household possessions—Simon's grinding wheel, iron pots and wooden bowls, a chest which had held the entire family's clothing, the bed and the goose-feather mattress from beside the fireplace, and the other bed and maize-husk mattress from the loft. Loading about half the articles in his oxcart, Georges had sold them to various neighbors, and then come back to load up the cart again. By the end of the day he had almost eleven francs. Angelique had taken half the money for herself, and left the other half with her uncle to help ease the burden of her mother on his family.

At the thought of her mother, Angelique's heart twisted. When they tried to get her from her house into the oxcart, she had resisted, crying out that she could not go anywhere because her husband and son would be coming in from the fields at any moment. But once they got to her brother's house she became completely silent, eating whatever was placed before her, going to bed when told to on the mattress where the two youngest girls of the family slept, and the rest of the time sitting motionless on a stool in one corner.

Angelique heard horses' hooves and the rumble of wheels on the road behind her. She turned around. Four big gray horses were pulling a long wagon piled high with hogsheads. She felt a throb of hope. That large a load of wine must be bound for some populous place, perhaps even Paris. Now, if the driver would stop . . .

He did. A stout red-faced man of about forty, he looked down at her from the high seat. "Where are you bound for, girl?"

"Paris."

"We'll go there together. Climb up."

She did not move. "I can pay you two francs."

He grinned, displaying a gap where two front teeth once

had been. "I don't want your money. There's a hay barn a few miles up the road. We can go in there and figure out how you'll pay me."

Angelique lifted her chin. The sudden movement made the shawl fall back from her bright hair. "I will give you two francs. In addition, you may kiss me. But that is all."

He was staring at her, a stunned look in his little eyes. Because she was muffled in the heavy shawl, apparently until now he had been aware only that she was young, and wore the clothes of a peasant.

He extended his hand down to her and said, in a very different tone, "Let me help you up."

With his aid she climbed to the seat beside him. As he picked up the reins, she asked in a clear voice, "Would you like to have the money and the kiss before we start?"

His face became even redder. "That was just a joke, made-moiselle. You do not have to pay me anything or . . . or do anything."

She was sure that he had not been joking when he spoke of the hay barn a few miles ahead. But all she said was, "Thank you."

The big wagon rolled on, drawn by the powerful grays past empty fields where crows pecked at grain left over from the harvest. Angelique found that she too felt powerful, in quite a different sense. Moments ago she had been trudging the dusty road, with a three- or four-day journey ahead of her. Now she was being carried swiftly and effortlessly toward her goal. And all because the man beside her had gotten a good look at her face.

For the past several years, of course, she had known she was attractive to males. But somehow until today she had not realized what the attractiveness could do for her.

From now on she would use to the full the value of her beauty—and of her virginity, because the importance men placed upon it made virginity valuable too. Hers would not be surrendered to a wagon driver or a peasant lout like Marcel, but only to a man able to reward her highly.

And when she was rich and influential, she thought, her heart beating fast, it might well be that her path would cross the Englishman's. In fact, she would hunt him down, that man who with one selfish, careless thrust of his hand had smashed a family to bits. And then somehow she would make

him pay. Pay for Claude lying dead in the field, for Simon standing with lowered gaze while the hangman slipped the noose over his head, and for her mother, huddled silently on a stool in a household not her own.

5

EXPERTLY GUIDING THE two pairs of big grays along the cobbled street, the wagon driver said, "Yes, best that I tell the innkeeper that you are my cousin."

Sitting beside the carter on the high plank seat, Angelique scarcely heard him. Paris, turbulent and exhilarating and more than a little frightening, was assaulting all her senses. Her ears were filled with the cries of street peddlers, the barking of dogs, the trilling of a flute behind an open window in one of the six-story houses that lined the narrow street. Her eyes drank in the sidewalk crowd—soldiers in their tall hats, workingmen with calf-length blue aprons protecting their breeches, and well-dressed middle-class men and women who moved in and out of ground-floor shops. Her high-cut nostrils quivered with the smell of Paris—baking bread, roasting coffee, and, even in this comparatively prosperous neighborhood, a whiff of drains. As for her sense of touch, her backside was already a little sore from the jolting ride over Paris cobblestones, even though it was less than half an hour since they had entered the city by the Barrière Villettee, one of the eastern gates in the stout wall encircling Paris.

"Yes," the carter repeated, "that will be best."

"What did you say?" Smiling, she turned to him. She had come to like him a lot since he had picked her up on the road to Paris three mornings ago. Within a few minutes she had learned that his name was Jules Rambier, that he lived in a village in the wine country twenty miles south of Angelique's village, and that his wife was dead and his two children grown. In return, Angelique had said merely that her father was dead and her mother ill, and that she herself hoped

to find work in Paris. The chain of events that had shattered her small family to bits was still so fresh in her memory that she was afraid to speak of them in detail, lest she find herself sobbing.

Both nights on the road they had stayed with peasants, friends of the wagon driver. Jules had slept in the lean-to barns. Angelique, in return for sharing her food with the family, had been given a pallet in front of the banked kitchen fire.

Now Jules said patiently, "I was talking about Etienne Ponselle, remember, the owner of the Taverne Ponselle." Ponselle's inn, according to Jules, was one of the better-class establishments in and around Paris, and might offer her reasonably congenial employment. "The only trouble is that Etienne expects to sleep with his serving wenches, although it is hard to blame the poor fellow, considering that his wife has been an invalid for about a dozen years.

"Anyway," he went on, "I could tell him you are my niece, and that would certainly keep him from trying to drag you into his bed, but then he would think ill of me for bringing such a close relative within his reach. So I will tell him you are my cousin. No, my wife's cousin. That should make you seem close enough to me that he will leave you alone, and yet not so close that he will lose his good opinion of me for bringing you to his place."

Looking at his perturbed countenance, Angelique wanted to say, "Don't worry. I can take care of myself." But that would have sounded like throwing his concern back in his face, and so she said, "Thank you, Jules. It was a lucky moment for me when you stopped beside me on the road."

Reddening, Jules muttered a shy acknowledgment.

They turned onto another street, lined with what Jules said were warehouses, and so narrow that when two vehicles met, one of them had to reverse its course until it could back into an alley or into a gap between the tall buildings. One vehicle for which Jules had to back up was a coach with a coat of arms adorning its side. Seeing the coach and its occupants, a stout elderly couple, bewigged and bejeweled, who did not even glance at the man who had laboriously moved his wagon out of their path, Angelique felt a flood of bitter memories. Richard Lansing, riding through St. Isidore in a similar coach. Simon, rocking his dead son back and forth in

his arms in the sun-drenched wheat field. And again Simon, standing with bent head in the village square, while the fat priest spoke to him about heaven, and the hangman waited with the black hood in his hands.

A few minutes later the lumbering wagon turned off the street of warehouses onto one which, according to the sign painted on the side of its corner house was called Rue de les Bains. Holding the reins in one hand, Jules reached behind him and then laid a stout club more than two feet long across his lap. A moment later Angelique realized why. This street was a slum. Men and women, gaunt faces stamped with hunger, slumped in doorways or moved listlessly along the street. Some of them stared at the carter and Angelique and the load of hogsheads with a kind of unfocused anger. Very young children played in the dirty gutters. Even on this October day, the little boys were naked except for ragged blouses. Outside a wine shop, two young women with scrawny bodies and thin, painted faces were locked in combat, screeching as each kicked at the other's legs and tugged at handfuls of hair. A soldier, perhaps the cause of their warfare, stood a few feet away, roaring with laughter and waving a bottle in his right hand. Poor as she had been all her life, Angelique had never encountered poverty that looked and sounded—and smelled—like this. Why, she wondered, was this called the Street of the Baths? To judge by the evidence of her eyes and nose, no one along this street had ever used water for any purpose but cooking.

"I always let them see I have a club when I turn onto this street," Jules said. "Even so, if I had been carting food instead of wine, I would not have chosen this route, even though it is a shortcut."

"Why not?"

"If I had food, these people might rush me, club or no club. Because wine is so cheap, barrels of it don't tempt that much." After a moment he added, "Maybe the powerful in France will always see to it that there is plenty of cheap wine. As long as people like these can get dead drunk for a few centimes, they are less apt to cause trouble."

The cart threaded its way through several more mean, noisy streets, and then took one that sloped upward. Soon the neighborhood changed, became almost rural in character. The houses were smaller, three stories at most, and in many cases

were separated by stretches of ground where chickens scratched and where poles which had supported last summer's beans and peas still stood. They passed through a gate in the city's northern wall. The soldier on guard greeted Jules by name and shot covert glances at Angelique. Then the wagon rolled along a dirt road past small farmhouses, separated by narrow fields and occasional vineyards. In some fields the sails of windmills moved in the faint breeze. "They call this district Montmartre," Jules said. "It is the good air up here that helps make Etienne Ponselle's inn so popular."

Not to mention the view, Angelique thought. Turning sideways on the wagon's seat, she looked down over the sea of rooftops beyond the city wall. She could see gilded church steeples gleaming in the near-noonday sun. On a boat-shaped island in the river that flowed through Paris was a vast building with two massive stone towers. That, she knew, must be the ancient church that even country people had heard of, the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

Jules said, "There is Ponselle's place."

A few hundred feet ahead, the upper stories and steeply pitched roof of the inn rose above its courtyard wall of rough white masonry. Moments later she saw that the wooden gates stood open. Jules guided the powerful grays onto the courtyard cobblestones and then reined in. Impressed, Angelique looked at the tavern. It was no match for the Château de Rhoulac, of course, but still it was a fine building, four stories of timbered white masonry flanked by wings of two stories each.

Jules said, "That is the kitchen wing on the left, with a big room above it where the womenservants sleep. Menservants sleep over the stable in the other wing." He need not have told her that the right wing houses the stables. Through its wide opened doors she could see a bay horse, tethered to a post and with its nose thrust into a loose box.

Jules handed Angelique the bag which held her extra blouse and skirt and pair of homespun drawers. Then he descended to the cobblestones and helped her to alight. At that moment the inn's front door opened and a man walked toward them across the courtyard.

"Hello, my friend," Jules said. "As you can see, I have brought your wine right on schedule."

The other man was staring at Angelique. Jules said, "I

have also brought my wife's young cousin, Angelique Dubois. Angelique, this is Etienne Ponselle."

She dropped a curtsy. Because of what Jules had told her about the innkeeper, she had feared that she would meet someone like Granny Monet's coarse-featured grandson Marcel. Instead she saw a tall man of early middle age, with thinning brown hair and a thickening waistline. His long face with its large, gentle, and rather melancholy brown eyes reminded Angelique of a hound's.

Jules said, "The girl's father is dead and her mother is ill. She hopes to find work in Paris. I remembered that the last time I was here you said that business was so brisk that you felt you had best hire another serving wench. If the position is still open . . ."

The innkeeper's eyes were still fixed on Angelique's face. "What?" He looked at Jules. "Oh, yes, the position is still open. You mean that your cousin would like . . ."

"I feel that she would be better off here," Jules went on, with a peculiar emphasis in his voice. "She is a country girl. She has never been out of the Château de Rhoulac district until now. I would not want a young female relation to work in most of the inns in Paris. But I think you can guarantee to me that here she will be safe."

A guilty expression came into Ponselle's large brown eyes, so that he looked more than ever like a hound, one who had just been reminded of past misdeeds.

"Of course, Jules," he said. "Any kinswoman of yours would be safe here." Then, to Angelique: "I will pay you a franc a week, plus board and room, of course. In addition, many of my customers are generous with the inn's servants. Are those terms—"

"They are quite satisfactory, monsieur."

"Jules, why don't you get a couple of the stable hands to help you unload the wine and store it in the cellar? I will take Angelique into the kitchen to meet the cook and the two other girls."

As she moved beside him across the cobblestones, the innkeeper said, "In the morning you will help the other girls serve breakfast, straighten the sleeping chambers, and make the beds. Dinner is served at two and supper at seven. You will help serve and prepare both meals. After supper the tap-room remains open until ten o'clock. You need not work in

the evenings if you choose not to. Hortense and Claudette plus the potboys can keep the customers supplied with wine and spirits. However, our patrons are more generous in the evenings . . ."

"I will work after supper." A few extra centimes each evening soon would bring her enough to replace her wooden clogs with slippers. In time she might be able to buy even one of the pretty, slender dresses and matching bonnets which she had seen worn on the more prosperous Paris streets that morning. And then, perhaps, when she met him, she would be able to attract him, that man who would lift her permanently out of poverty and helplessness and fear, lift her so high that she could deal on equal terms with the de Rhoulacs of the world—and the Richard Lansings.

Opening a wooden door, Ponselle led her into the heat and appetizing smells of the long, low-ceilinged kitchen. In a huge fireplace at the room's far end a pig roasted on one spit and at least a half-dozen chickens on another. A towheaded boy of about ten was turning the spit that held the pig. A boy who might have been his year-younger brother held the handle of the spit upon which the chickens were threaded.

On one side of the room a man with formidable mustachios, a white apron, and mushroom-shaped white cap stood at a table, wielding a cleaver with such savage force that one might have thought it was his mortal enemy, rather than a side of beef, which lay stretched out before him. At one end of the same table stood two young women, one tall and rawboned, with sandy hair, eyebrows so light that they appeared nonexistent, and a homely but pleasant face. The other girl, plump and of average height, was a rather pretty redhead. Both of them were slicing turnips into wooden bowls.

As Ponselle and Angelique approached the table, the man in the white apron, cleaver poised, looked at them with such truculence that she quailed inwardly. It was to take her several days to learn that his ill-temper was so constant that no one heeded it.

The innkeeper said, "Charles, this is Angelique, our new serving wench." Then he turned to the girls and introduced the tall one as Hortense, and the redhead as Claudette. Hortense smiled, revealing big square teeth. Claudette, apparently sensing a rival, not only for her employer's affections but for

the centimes of generous customers, gave Angelique a tight little smile that did not reach her hazel eyes.

"Well, I had best help with the hogsheads," Ponselle said, and turned away.

Angelique gave the cook a timid smile. "If I could take my things up to my sleeping place—"

"Later!" Charles bellowed. "Put that bag under the table. Then sit down over there"—he nodded toward the other end of the table, where a long knife lay beside an iron pot—"and peel those potatoes."

She sat on a stool at the opposite end of the table from Hortense and Claudette, took a thick-skinned potato from the pot, and began to peel it. She thought, such waste! In the Dubois household potatoes had been cooked unpeeled, so that each family member could scrape out with his wooden spoon the last bit of sustenance inside the skin.

Hortense asked, "Where do you come from?"

"A farm near St. Isidore. That is part of the Château de Rhoulac manor."

"I was a farmgirl, too, although my people's farm was only three miles outside the city walls. But Claudette here is a real Parisienne, born on the Left Bank a stone's throw from the Seine."

Claudette waited until Charles crossed the room to reprimand the small boys turning the fireplace spits. Then she said, with her little cat's smile, "We'll show you in a few minutes where you sleep. You won't be sleeping there tonight, though."

Although she was sure of the answer, Angelique asked coolly, "What do you mean?"

"You will be in Etienne Ponselle's bed."

"Nothing could be more certain than that," Hortense said cheerfully. "Why, sometimes he even sleeps with a carthorse like me, just as a change from Claudette here."

"I don't think he will choose me." Angelique tried to keep her voice pleasant. If she was to stay here, she would have to get along with these girls. "You see, Jules Rambier, the wagon driver who brought me here, is a cousin of mine. He told Monsieur Ponselle that."

"And told him, too, that he had better keep his hands off." Claudette's voice held a blend of emotion—relief that in at least one respect Angelique would not be a rival, and resent-

ment that the newcomer should have been set aside as un-touchable.

Less than a minute later Etienne Ponselle came into the kitchen. In one big hand he carried a pair of flat-heeled black leather slippers. "Your cousin had to hurry off to make his next delivery," the innkeeper said "He asked me to say good-bye to you and to tell you that he will be back in a month."

"Thank you, monsieur."

He held out the slippers. "Wear these. They are my wife's. They will be more comfortable than your clogs, and less noisy." He added, "Try them on."

She found them to be a trifle too wide and too short. Nevertheless, as he had said, they were more comfortable than her wooden clogs. "Thank you, monsieur. And please thank Madame for me."

Somehow his faint smile made his long hound's face look even sadder. "I will tell her. However, she has no need for them."

When her employer had gone, Angelique looked toward a second table, a heavy butcher's block. Charles stood there, slicing the roasted pig which the two boys, staggering under its weight as they grasped the ends of the spit, had carried over to the block.

Angelique asked in a low voice, "What did Monsieur Ponselle mean? Why does his wife not need slippers?"

Still slicing turnips, Hortense answered, "His wife is paralyzed from the waist down. It happened twelve years ago, when they had been married only two months. A cart she was in overturned and threw her against a boulder. It did something to her back."

Poor woman, Angelique thought. And poor Etienne Ponselle, tied for life to a cripple, and thus denied legitimate offspring. No wonder he looked sad. No wonder he took serving wenches to bed. But all she said was, "These potatoes cannot be cooked in time for two o'clock dinner, can they?"

"No, they are for supper, along with cold meat. Dinner is hot roast pork and roast chicken and boiled onions."

The smell of the sliced pork reminded Angelique that she'd had no food since an early-morning breakfast of bread and cheese and gruel. "When do we have our dinner?"

"As soon as we have served the customers."

Even though he had been muttering to himself as he sliced, Hortense's words must have reached the cook's ears, because he bellowed, "And you had better start right now." With his slicing knife he pointed to the shelves, laden with pewter plates and tankards, that ran along one wall. "Take down those plates!"

The rest of the day passed swiftly. Angelique found that every table in the taproom, which was also the main dining salon, was occupied by male customers. Some of them, Hortense told her as she and Angelique hurried from taproom to kitchen and back again, were travelers staying at the inn. Others were Parisian merchants who had come up from the city for their early-afternoon repast.

In a smaller room off the taproom, couples and families were seated. One group especially drew Angelique's attention. Although they were extremely well-dressed, they did not have the poised hauteur of aristocrats. Therefore Angelique concluded that they were of the rich merchant class. The husband was about thirty, with a dignified, almost pompous air. His wife was pretty, despite a rather fretful expression. They were accompanied by a girl of perhaps six and a boy a year or two younger.

As she placed a food-laden plate before the young wife, Angelique thought: Why can't I have someday all that she has? True, this woman was probably born in a merchant's house, and Angelique was born in a peasant's hut. But that did not mean necessarily that she could not do as well in life, or even better.

During the two-o'clock meal, and later on at supper, she observed that Monsieur Ponselle's customers were a well-behaved lot. True, the men who drank in the taproom from suppertime to ten o'clock eyed her more boldly and called her "my little one" and "my pretty." But no one grabbed at her waist or derriere, or even tried to seize her hand.

A little before eleven she climbed the steep ladder which led up from the kitchen to an open trapdoor and the big room above. In late afternoon Hortense had brought her up here, pointed out the hooks for clothing affixed to one wall, and told her that she might have her choice of two mattresses, one near the trapdoor, the other beneath a window set in the room's slanting wall. Even though she knew that the mattress near the trapdoor would be warmer, since it

was close to the heat rising from the kitchen's banked fire, Angelique chose the one close to the window. It would be pleasant to look at the stars before she fell asleep, and, upon awakening, to feel the morning sun on her face.

Tonight, though, she would do no stargazing. She was far too weary. She stripped to her shift, hung up her blouse and skirt, and lay down beneath two worn but clean-smelling blankets. She saw Hortense, tall and bony in her shift, lean above the lighted candle stub on a rickety table near her own mattress. Then the big room was dark.

Claudette was not with them. That did not surprise Angelique. She had seen their employer and the red-haired girl whispering in a corner of the taproom less than an hour ago.

Tired as she was, she could not keep scenes of the day just past from moving before her mind's eye. The walls of Paris as she and Jules approached them in the creaking wagon. Her first sight of the blue Seine and its bridges, some crowded with tall houses. Noisome Rue de les Bains with its almost skeletal faces, and dirty half-naked children, and battling whores.

She whispered, "Hortense, are you asleep?"

From her mattress several yards away Hortense said, "What is it?"

"Today Jules and I drove along a street called Street of the Baths. Do you know why it is called that?"

"Someone told me that a long time ago—oh, maybe even more than a thousand years ago—some people built big public baths here in Paris. and that street led to them. They were not French people. They were something else."

Romans, Angelique thought. Jacques had told her about the Romans, and of how they had ruled France when it was part of a vast territory called Gaul. He had spoken, too, one night when he had taken supper with the Dubois family, of a slave revolt led by a man called Spartacus. As they ate, not just the usual potatoes and bread, but the boiled rabbit Jacques had contributed to the meal, Angelique had plied him with questions. How much of the world had the Romans conquered? And those slaves. Were they worse or better off than the peasants who, these past few years, sometimes had eaten grass to stay alive?

As he answered, that moist, shiny look his eyes always took on when they regarded her became more pronounced.

At last he seemed to lose track of his words. He said awkwardly, "I have been talking too much. I should let your father and mother get in a few words."

Dear Jacques. Had he, as his note to the village intendant had said, gone to Marseilles? Or was he back in St. Isidore? Or was he, for whatever reason, somewhere here in the Paris maze of fine boulevards, bustling commercial streets, and filthy slums?

Her thoughts blurred, and she slept.



THREE MONTHS LATER she saw Richard Lansing again.

She had been reasonably content during those months. True, her days were sixteen hours long, with only an hour of leisure between the completion of dinner service and the start of supper preparations. And true, she had only one day off each week. But since early childhood she had been used to hard work. What she had never had before were the good and plentiful meals she shared in the kitchen with Charles, the other two serving wenches, and the two young boys, sons of the head stableman.

She soon found, of course, that not all of the men customers were content just to stare at her. Parisian merchants suggested that she meet them somewhere in the city on her day off. Travelers staying at the inn whispered that they would make a nighttime visit to their rooms very much worth her while. She never became indignant. On the contrary, she rebuffed them gently and with a smile. But she managed to make it clear that she was seeking much more than liaisons with men willing to pay a few francs for an hour or so of her company in bed.

She had been at the inn about two weeks when she met Madame Ponselle. Usually it was Eduard, the elder of the two little scullions, who carried the invalid's tray through the

taproom and up the stairs. But on that particular day he was absent with what his brother called "the devil of a bellyache." And so it was Angelique who took the tray up the stairs to the landing, and then, following the directions Hortense had given her, walked along the hall toward the front of the house. Balancing the tray on one arm, she knocked on the door at the end of the hall, and then, when bidden to enter, swung the door back.

A dark-haired woman sat in the sunshine flooding through the front window, a knit yellow shawl across her knees and an open book on the table before her. Later Angelique was to learn that the chair in which the woman sat had been equipped with wheels by her husband, so that she could move at will over to the tall wardrobe with its carved doors, or the bed canopied in blue velvet, or the dainty little rosewood desk in one corner.

"Good afternoon, madame. I have brought your dinner."

The woman smiled. "Thank you."

As Angelique crossed the room, she realized that her employer's wife was not at all what she had expected. She had an invalid's thinness and pallor, true. But her attractive face with its great dark eyes looked startlingly young, not much past twenty-three or -four. It was as if the enforced inactivity of the past dozen years had somehow preserved her freshness, like that of a handsome insect caught in amber.

"Put the tray here on the table, please."

As she did so, Angelique looked at the open book. What was it? A romance, a book of history, poetry? No, not poetry. Jacques had read to her from a book of poetry once. The printed lines on the page had been shorter, with wide margins on each side.

This was not Madame Ponselle's only book. A low, doorless cupboard beneath the windowsill, within easy reach of the invalid's hand, held three shelves filled with books.

When the girl straightened, Madame Ponselle said, "You must be Angelique, my husband's newest employee."

The woman's smile, wry and sad but not at all accusatory, told what she was thinking. Angelique wanted to say, "You are wrong! I have not slept with your husband." Instead she burst out, "How I envy you, madame!"

"Envy me!"

"Yes, because you can read." Jacques once had told her

that the illiterate live in only one world, but that those who could read were able to live in hundreds, even thousands, as many worlds as there were books.

"Someday," she went on, "when I have leisure, I shall learn to read."

The invalid looked at her thoughtfully. Then she smiled. "You know, my dear, I think you will."

"Is there anything else I can do for you, madame?"

"No, thank you, Angelique."

Three times more during the next few weeks it fell to Angelique's lot to carry a dinner tray to Madame Ponselle. The third time the woman said, faint color in her cheeks, "I want to ask you something about my husband." She added, quickly and with seeming irrelevance, "Not that he is not a good man. He is very good. He has tried to keep me from feeling how much of a burden I am to him. And he has given me this fine room, for which he could charge his guests a lot of money. It is the largest in the house, and it has this marvelous view." She gestured out the window toward the walled city below, sunless today but still magically beautiful with its thousands of tiled rooftops and its silver river dividing to flow past Notre Dame's island.

Angelique said, puzzled, "It is indeed a fine room, madame. But what . . . ?"

"What is it I want to ask? Well, you see, I know that my husband has taken serving wenches to bed, including the other two he has now. I cannot blame him. And I certainly am not indignant on behalf of the girls. I am sure that Claudette and Hortense were—how shall I put it?—well-experienced before they came here. But you, I have come to feel, are not experienced. Am I right about that?"

"Yes, madame. I am not experienced in the way you mean."

The large dark eyes looked into Angelique's wide-set blue ones. "Has my husband tried to force himself upon you?"

"No, madame. You see, Jules Rambier, who picked me up on the road and brought me to Paris in his wagon, told Monsieur Ponselle that I am his wife's cousin."

"And are you?" As Angelique hesitated, the woman went on with a faint smile, "Never mind answering that. But I want to warn you that even if my husband has left you alone so far, he will not do so forever."

"I know, madame." She had become increasingly aware over the weeks of the hunger in Etienne Ponselle's sad hound's eyes. "But it will do him no good. I have . . . other plans."

Again that faint smile. "I imagine you have. I even imagine your plans have a good chance of success."

"Madame?"

"Yes, Angelique?"

"Would you write a letter to my mother for me? It would have to be sent to the village priest, since my mother cannot read or write."

"Of course. Just bring me pen and ink and paper. You'll find them in the desk over there."

A moment later Madame Ponselle said, dipping her quill pen into an ink bottle of pale blue china, "Now, tell me your mother's name, and the priest's, and the name of your village."

Angelique did so.

"And what is it you want to tell your mother?"

"That I am well, and have employment I like. That I love her, and hope to come to see her soon."

"Very well. I will write it and have my husband post it tomorrow with my own letters."

A few nights later temptation became too much for Etienne Ponselle.

It was Angelique's turn that night to be excused from the washing-up. Each night after supper, whichever two girls were on duty carried water from the courtyard well into the kitchen, poured it into the wooden sink with its wooden-stoppered drainpipe leading outside the building, and, with the aid of the two sleepy little scullions, washed the pewter plates and bowls and wooden spoons used at the evening meal. Tonight, leaving Hortense and Claudette engaged in some obscure quarrel as they stood at the sink, arms plunged to the elbows in greasy water, Angelique climbed the steep ladder, came back down with her red shawl wrapped around her, and went through the inn's back door to the courtyard. Even though the December night was cold, she found it pleasant to be out there under the glittering stars. Through the inn's thick rear wall came a faint sound of laughter and of voices singing. Soon she would have to go into the taproom and help the potboys, two pimply youths of about seventeen, serve

tonight's large crowd of customers. But for a few minutes she could enjoy the quiet darkness.

A step behind her on the path. She turned to see Ponselle's tall, unmistakable pear shape, narrow of head and shoulders and wide in the midsection. With an inarticulate sound he reached out and tried to draw her close to him. She resisted, palms flattened against his chest.

"Please, Angelique, please!"

"Monsieur! Stop it!"

For a few moments more he persisted, trying to pull her into his arms and making inarticulate sounds that resembled moans. Then he gave up. He let go of her and stood with hanging head. "I am sorry, Angelique. I could not help myself."

"It is all right, monsieur." What a nice, sad man he was. After a moment she added, "Would you like for me to find other employment, monsieur?"

He hesitated, as if he almost wished that she would remove herself—and temptation—from his premises immediately. Then he said in a reluctant voice, "No. What I feel is not your fault. And you are good for business, Angelique. I have many more customers than I used to, especially in the evenings."

He paused and then went on, "You will not tell my old friend Jules when he makes his next wine delivery, will you?"

"Of course not."

She expected him to turn away then. Instead he stood looking down at her through the darkness. The silence lengthened. Then he said swiftly, as if to overcome his own reluctance, "I have a nephew, my sister's son. He would make a suitable husband for you. He is a likely-looking lad, and his family runs a good business, a bake shop on the Left Bank. You should be helping a husband in his own business, not working someplace where men . . ."

He broke off, and then added, "I will send him a message tomorrow to come here with his parents. I am sure that after all three of them have seen you and talked to you, they will favor the match."

"Thank you, monsieur. But please do not have your nephew come here. A marriage between us would be quite impossible."

"Impossible! Why?"

"Because I would not want to marry him."

"Would not want . . . Angelique!" He did not sound indignant or hurt, just dumbfounded. "How many tavern wenches get a chance to marry into the *petite bourgeoisie*? What is it you want, girl, what do you want?"

After several moments she said, "I want a lot. I want to be rich and powerful enough so that no one will ever dare hurt me, or my mother, or anyone of my blood."

"Child, child! How do you expect to get such riches and power?"

"Through a man. Through marriage to him, if possible, but anyway, through a man." Her voice gathered passion. "I wish it were possible for women to make their own fortunes. God knows I would if I could. But unfortunately it is only through men that a woman can get anything, achieve anything."

He said soberly, sadly, "Angelique, best that you choose some honest, hardworking man, whether my nephew or someone else. Reaching so high, you may overreach yourself. And then you may land, not in a place of luxury and power, but in the gutter. Think about that, Angelique."

He turned away. She looked after him, his words echoing in her ears. The gutter. She thought of the two hair-pulling prostitutes locked in combat on the Street of the Baths, while the drunken soldier who might or might not choose to pay one of them a few centimes for five minutes' use of her body stood by laughing.

Something colder than the crisp winter air touched her, a kind of premonition. She shivered and drew the red shawl closer around her. Then her courage and determination came flooding back. Head high, she walked toward the inn's rear door.

In midafternoon two days later, little Eduard, returning to the kitchen with Madame Ponselle's empty dinner tray, told Angelique that Madame had a letter for her. Heart beating fast, Angelique hurried to the invalid's room.

"I am afraid it is rather short," Madame Ponselle said, and then read aloud:

My dear child:

I am glad that you have employment.

I read your letter to your mother, but I am not sure she understood. She made no response. I fear she has

not yet reconciled herself to God's will, and so remains sunk in melancholy and silence.

I will write to you if there is any change in your mother's state.

May God help you withstand the temptations that must now beset you.

Yours in Christ,

Father Jean-Paul Belleau

The invalid folded the note. Dark eyes brimming with unspoken questions, she handed the note to Angelique.

"Thank you, madame." Angelique thrust the note down the front of her blouse. "Sunk in melancholy and silence." Angelique could see her there on the kitchen stool in her brother's house, face expressionless, while inside she wept endless tears for her gentle son, and for the awkward, tender-hearted man to whom she had been married for more than half her life. Beneath her own anguish Angelique felt a surge of white-hot hatred.

Madame Ponselle said, "My dear, I do not want to pry, but I can see that, young as you are, you have suffered some sort of tragedy. If it would ease you to speak of it . . ."

"Thank you, madame. It is just that someone . . . smashed my family to bits. Perhaps someday I can speak of it. But right now . . ." She broke off.

"Right now it is still too painful for you to talk of it."

Angelique nodded. Again she murmured her thanks, and then returned to the kitchen to help prepare supper.

Disappointing though it was, the priest's note was a link to her mother, and to her own growing-up years, which now, in retrospect, seemed to her so peaceful and happy. At night she kept the note beneath her mattress, lest Hortense or Claudette find it. Neither of the girls could read, but the ill-tempered Charles could, and one of the girls might take it to him. She shrank at the thought of discussing her family's tragedy with those three, even though she had come to like them well enough. By day she carried the note in the front of her blouse, and felt vaguely comforted whenever she heard the faint crackle of the paper.

She was carrying the letter inside her blouse the cold January night when, entering the taproom to serve the after-supper customers, she saw Richard Lansing. Despite the instant

leap of emotion within her, pain and grief and rage, she managed to hold on to the tray of wineglasses she carried.

He sat at a table to the left of the roaring fireplace with two older men, both stout and with graying hair, whom she recognized. They were traveling merchants, one dealing in lace goods and the other in pewterware. Both had stayed previously at Ponselle's tavern. As she moved forward on legs that felt weak, she saw that two well-stuffed saddlebags lay beneath their table, close to Richard Lansing's feet.

The wine she carried was for the party of four men seated on the right side of the fireplace. She served them, picked up the tray, and then looked at Lansing's table. The two merchants smiled at her, and one of them called, "Hello, Angélique." Also smiling, Lansing stared at her with frankly admiring brown eyes. For a moment she looked back, mesmerized, at his face, a face in which the strong, almost harsh planes of cheekbone and jaw were contradicted by the mouth's sensually full underlip.

Then, with an effort, she managed to give him the same smile she gave all the men patrons. It was a smile that acknowledged a man's interest, but promised nothing.

His gaze held no hint of recognition. But then, probably he had never seen her before. When she glimpsed him riding through the village in a de Rhoulac coach, he had been looking straight ahead. And when his black horse had leaped the wall that day, all of Lansing's attention had been centered on the fleeing stag. Probably he had been only vaguely aware of the girl who had thrown herself to one side, or of the young boy he had thrust violently from his path.

Patrons at the table to the left of the fireplace were always served by one of the potboys. But as she served wine and brandy and sometimes a plate of bread and cold chicken to customers at nearby tables, she managed to catch bits of Richard Lansing's conversation with the two merchants. Thus she gathered that he had come to France ten days ago to sell some of his father's lands near Paris. Now, with the sale completed, he intended to set out the next morning for Calais, and from there sail home to England. A few minutes later, when she came to clear away the glasses from another nearby table, the conversation between the Englishman and his companions had changed. Now Lansing talked of a recent voyage he had made to the newly formed United States of

America. "I admire their doctrine that every man, no matter what his birth, should have an opportunity to rise in the world. The idea is not only just. It should release the energies of all the American people."

Angelique thought bitterly: You hypocrite! Where were your noble sentiments when, just for your own sport, you trampled the wheat field where my family had worked so hard and with such hopes of a decent harvest? Where were your notions of justice and equality when you knocked my brother aside to his death, and then rode on without a backward glance?

When she again returned to the taproom, she saw that the two merchants had gone, probably to their sleeping chambers. As she passed Lansing, she did not look at him. Nevertheless she could feel his attention focused upon her, almost as intently as a burning glass focuses the sun's rays.

As she started back to the kitchen he said, "Mademoiselle . . ."

Heart racing, she halted. "Yes, monsieur?"

"Will you have a glass of wine with me?"

"It is not allowed, monsieur."

That was true. Three years earlier a serving wench then in Ponselle's employ had sat at a table with several patrons. A jealous row had broken out and somehow extended itself to other tables. Glasses had been shattered, pewter plates dented, chair legs broken. Since then his women employees had been forbidden to sit with customers, although he had never objected to his serving wenches visiting patrons in their rooms. Angelique knew that Claudette frequently earned extra money in this fashion. Even the ungainly Hortense sometimes shared a patron's bed.

Angelique said, past the hate-speeded pulse in her throat, "Did you have something to say to me, monsieur?"

"Yes. I think you know what it is." As she had noticed before, his French, although fluent, had a strong English accent. "And since I am denied the polite preliminary of buying you a glass of wine, I shall come right to the point. Will you visit me in my room tonight? If so, you will find me generous."

For a moment she had to struggle with an impulse to hurl the tray, laden with empty and near-empty wineglasses, straight into his face. Then an idea, monstrous but overwhelmingly tempting, burst into her consciousness. In his

room he would be alone with her and completely off guard, this man who, directly and indirectly, had killed two people she loved and destroyed the mind of a third. Perhaps fate, or whatever one chose to call it, was giving her a chance to administer the justice otherwise denied to people like Marie and Simon and Claude.

And afterward, she thought, her heart pounding now, if no one had known she was going to his room, if no one had seen her enter or leave, there was little chance that she would ever be suspected.

After all, everyone here, from Monsieur Ponselle to Charles to the potboys, knew that she never accepted invitations to patrons' rooms.

He said, smiling, "No answer? Is it because Ponselle has made some new rule for his serving girls? If so, I will fix it up with him. He is a good fellow. Besides, I have stayed here at his inn several times, and so did my father years ago."

"Oh, please, monsieur." If Ponselle or anyone else gained an inkling that she might have gone to the Englishman's room, then she would have no chance of escaping the consequences of anything she might do there. "You must not mention it to Monsieur Ponselle. He would . . . I mean, he is very jealous."

"So it is like that between you and him, is it? Well, I should have realized it would be, the instant I saw you. And who could blame the fellow? But you will somehow manage to come to me for a while tonight?"

Heartbeats almost suffocating, she nodded.

"Do you know which is my room?" She shook her head. "It is the big one overlooking the rear courtyard, the one with the mahogany wardrobe and hautboy."

She nodded. Except for Madame Ponselle's room with its view of all Paris, the room Lansing had described was the best in the house.

He looked around the taproom, now empty of patrons except for himself. "Can you come to my room in about twenty minutes?"

She nodded. Smiling, he pushed back his chair. "Until then, mademoiselle."

She went back to the kitchen. Because after-supper patronage of the taproom had been especially heavy that night, Ponselle had ordered that the girls concentrate on serving the

customers, and leave the washing-up of supper utensils until later. Now Claudette was at the wooden sink, pouring into it the buckets of water the sleepy little scullions had fetched from the courtyard well. Hortense had already placed one large foot on the ladder leading up to the attic.

"Hortense."

The tall young woman turned. "Yes?"

Angelique asked, "Will you help with the washing-up tonight?"

"But it is my turn not to!"

"I know. But I . . . I have a headache. Please, Hortense. I will do the washing tomorrow night and the next night too, even though it will be my turn to be off."

After a frowning moment Hortense said good-naturedly, "Oh, all right."

She walked over to Claudette, picked up the second bucket of water, and began to pour it into the sink. Angelique turned and looked at the butcher block. Each night, as soon as supper was prepared, the small boys cleaned and polished the explosive-tempered cook's fine array of wooden-handled knives and laid them out on the block. As Angelique passed it, she swiftly snatched one of the knives and thrust it into her skirt's deep pocket.

Up in the big room at the top of the ladder, she took the box of flints and lit the candle, dimly aware of her own wavering shadow on the wooden wall. She turned and looked at the door in the opposite wall. It opened onto a corridor which joined this wing to the main part of the inn, a corridor which Claudette, and sometimes Hortense, used on their visits to their employer's bed. Would she herself really go through that door tonight and, at her earliest opportunity, plunge a knife into Richard Lansing's back? If so, what about afterward? She hoped to slip back to this big room before Hortense or Claudette came up from the kitchen, wipe the knife clean with a bit of cloth dampened with water from the pitcher beside the washbasin, and then, sometime after her companions fell asleep, slip down to the kitchen to restore the knife to its place on the block.

But what if, she thought, sickened by the mental picture, blood spurted over her clothes? Should she try to hide her blouse and skirt until she had a chance to wash them? No, that would not do. Soon after the Englishman's body was dis-

covered, the police would search every room in the inn. No, if her clothing became stained, it would be best for her to hurry back to the attic for her red wool shawl, her spare blouse and skirt and drawers, and the almost eight francs she had saved toward a dress and bonnet. Then she would disappear from the inn into the city below.

Through the sound of her quickened breath and heartbeats she heard a faint crackling. The village priest's letter. Best to destroy it, reluctant as she was to do so. If she did remain here, and if her room and her person was searched, the police might send someone to St. Isidore to talk to the priest who had written the letter, and thus learn she had a strong motive to square accounts with the Englishman. She took the note, held it to the candle flame until it was a curling black fragment, and then ground the ashes into the bare floor with her foot until they were only a dark smudge.

Filled with bitterness and hatred and fear, not really knowing whether or not she was capable of driving a knife into any human being, even one who so richly deserved it, she opened the door, and by the light of one oil lamp burning in its wall sconce, moved along the corridor that led to the main part of the inn.



A FEW MOMENTS later she tapped on a door. It opened promptly. He had taken off the dark green coat he had worn earlier that evening. In ruffled shirt and fawn-colored breeches, he stood silhouetted against the mingled candlelight and firelight behind him.

"You are prompt," he said. "Come in."

On legs that felt wooden, she stepped over the threshold. As befitted the best room in the house, this one was extravagantly lighted by a half-dozen candles in brass candelabra on a stand beside the four-poster bed with its blue brocade can-

opy, and by a matching candelabrum atop the mahogany hautboy. His bulging saddlebags, she noticed, lay on the floor beside the bed. At the opposite end of the room a fire flickered beneath a black marble mantel.

He said, smiling, "Now shall we have that glass of wine?"

Would wine give her courage? Or would it befuddle her, at least slightly, at a time when she would need all her wits? Finally she said, "If you insist, monsieur, but I would prefer not."

"I don't insist. I have had more than enough wine for one evening, although I hope not too much for the business ahead of us."

Still smiling, he reached out with his right arm and drew her to him. With the crooked forefinger of his left hand he tilted her chin. As she stood rigid, his warm mouth came down upon her own.

When he raised his head, his brown eyes looked puzzled. "My dear, what is it? You are as stiff as a plaster saint. Do you find me so distasteful? Most women don't."

Distasteful. A kiss from a man who had destroyed every human being she loved. And he wondered if she had found the experience distasteful. She said, from a dry throat, "Of course not, monsieur."

"Then perhaps you will be more relaxed without your clothing. Here, let me help you." He began to untie the drawstring of her blue homespun blouse.

"No!" She shrank back, not just from the touch of his square brown hands against her breast, but because of a sudden terrified realization. If he undressed her, he would be sure to discover the knife.

He said, still good-naturedly, "My dear, I am a patient man. But aren't you being unreasonable? Surely a few men, or at the very least Ponselle, have seen you naked. And if that is not the case . . . Well, as I told you, I am prepared to be generous. But I am also a man who likes to see what he is buying."

He added, more briskly but still with that good-humored smile, "So the clothes are coming off, mademoiselle. Whether it is you or I who takes them off is up to you."

"I . . . I will do it." Her trembling hands flew to the drawstring of her blouse. Half turned away from him, she drew the blouse over her head and laid it on a chair beside the tall

wardrobe. She reached behind her and undid the wooden button that fastened her skirt at the waist. Trying to move carefully despite her knotted stomach and trembling hands, she stepped out of her skirt, quickly folded it, and laid it atop her blouse. For a moment she stood there, head drooping, in the pair of homespun long drawers she had made in her parents' hut the winter before. She forced herself to undo their waist button so that they fell, forced herself to step out of them. Head still lowered, she placed them atop her other clothing. Then, after a moment, she turned toward him, her gaze still fixed on the floor.

For several seconds he was silent. Then he said, in a soft voice, "I was sure you would be lovely, but not that lovely." He touched her cheek gently. "Ponselle is a good fellow, but he does not deserve anyone like you." He gave an unsteady laugh. "I am starting for Calais at daybreak tomorrow. Perhaps I should scoop you up onto my saddle and take you with me."

He walked away then, sat down on the far side of the bed, and took off his ruffled white shirt. Mesmerized, she stared at his brown muscled back with its faint sheen of good health. He bent, began to remove his boots.

She turned her head toward the chair that held her clothing and then froze. Part of the knife's wooden handle protruded from her skirt pocket.

As she stared at it, the madness of the last twenty minutes or so dropped from her, and she knew that—despite Claude, and Simon, and Marie—she could never have used that knife on a fellow creature, not even Richard Lansing. How could she have ever dreamed herself capable of such an act?

He must not see that knife!

She moved to the chair, took the knife from the skirt pocket. Where to hide it? Under the pile of clothing? No, no! Better to slip it out of sight, under the tall wardrobe. Then tomorrow morning, when Richard Lansing was well away from here, she would return to this room—

"What are you doing with that knife?"

Her heart gave a convulsive leap. The weapon still in her hand, she turned toward him. He stood facing her. How, she wondered numbly, had he known? Had she made some sound? Then she realized the answer. As he sat on the bed's edge, he had faced a window. In its shiny black pane he must

have seen her reflection as she moved to her clothing, took up the knife, and stood there hesitating.

There was anger in his face and a kind of shocked unbelief. Bootless now, wearing only breeches and stockings, he strode toward her. Even before he reached her, the knife had dropped from her nerveless fingers. He grasped her shoulders with ungentle hands.

"What did you plan to do with that knife?" He gave her shoulders a rough shake. "Answer me? Why did you come here with it?"

She looked up into the face above her own. No hint of lazy good humor there now. Just shock and cold fury. She thought of herself arrested for attempted murder of this foreign aristocrat, thought of spending decades locked in a noisome prison, or even of standing, as Simon had, on a scaffold . . .

"Answer me!"

No good to try to fob him off with some story about having accidentally brought the knife with her. He would not believe that. No one would, not after watching the window-pane's reflection of her furtive behavior. What could she say, then, to ward off a charge of attempted murder? She tore her gaze from his, looked wildly to the right, the left . . .

Over there by the bed, the bulging saddlebags.

She flicked her tongue over her dry lips. "It was for the bags. I was going to wait until you fell asleep. But I thought I might find the bags locked, so I brought the knife to slit the leather. I mean, I thought you might be carrying money—"

"You know damn well I am carrying money! You must have heard me tonight telling those men about my selling my father's French property.

"A thief," he went on furiously, "a rotten, common little thief. And here I thought you were the loveliest . . ."

He broke off, and then gave a short laugh. "Well, thieving whore that you are, you are still the most appetizing bit of female flesh I have ever seen."

His mouth descended upon hers, roughly, bruisingly. His hands left her shoulders to close around her small, high breasts. He raised his head. One hand grasping her upper arm, he propelled her toward the bed. "Lie down."

She obeyed. Don't resist, she warned herself, aware of the

sick hammering of her heart. If she made him any angrier, he might hurt her badly.

He was beside the bed now, unlacing his breeches. She closed her eyes. Moments later she felt his naked weight upon her. Grasping a handful of her hair to hold her head steady, he gave her another of those rough, punishing kisses. Then she felt his mouth on her breast, and thought: Oh, please, don't let him sink his teeth . . . But it was only his lips that closed around the nipple. For a moment through her shock and fear she felt another sensation, but before she could identify it, it was gone. His legs were thrusting her legs apart now.

She felt it then, a tearing pain so sharp that her eyes flew open, and she cried out. His movements ceased for an instant. In the dark face inches above her own she saw not just lust and rage, but surprise. Then, as he thrust more deeply into her, she closed her eyes and moaned.

A few more thrusts, still painful to her but less so than the first one. Then it was over.

As she lay with eyes still closed, he rolled away from her. After a while she heard the bed creak as he left it. She heard the wardrobe door open and close. Then he said, from beside the bed, "So you are a liar as well as a thief. You led me to believe you were Ponselle's doxy. And yet I found you to be a maiden."

She opened her eyes and looked at him dully as he stood beside the bed, knotting the cord of a dark green velvet robe around him. "Get dressed." His voice was harsh. "Get out of here."

She got off the bed. As she crossed the room to her pile of clothing, she was aware of a warm trickle of blood down the inside of her thighs. Too wretched to care now that he watched her, she stepped into the ugly homemade drawers and pulled them up over her hips. She put on her blouse and skirt. The knife, she noticed dully, was still lying where she had dropped it.

From halfway across the room he asked, "How is it you were still virgin? Are you one of those who like other girls? Is that it?"

She shook her head. She was aware of something strained and false in his manner, as if he were finding it an effort to keep his rage and contempt alive.

He said, "I think you must be mad. How did you hope to escape after robbing me? Did you plan to sneak out of this inn, weighted down with two hundred golden louis, and try to hide yourself somewhere in Paris? Why, a girl as conspicuous in appearance as you are would have been apprehended by noon tomorrow."

She said nothing, just stood there with lowered head.

"I shall not turn you over to the authorities, even though I should. Ponselle is a good fellow, and I do not want to do anything to give his inn a bad name. But I shall tell him the truth about you." Again she had the sense that he was using outrage as a defense against some emotion he did not want to acknowledge—pity, perhaps, or even guilt. "It would not be right to let him go on harboring a thief who might victimize others of his guests."

So she was to lose her employment. She asked, in a dull voice, "May I return the knife?"

"Return it to where?"

"To the chopping block in the kitchen. The knife belongs to the cook, Monsieur Charles." Perhaps there was at least one thing she could escape, the cook's volcanic wrath. "Monsieur Charles has a very bad temper."

He said grimly, "You think that if he knows you took it he might cut your pretty throat with it. I agree that would be a rather harsh penalty for a theft you were not able to accomplish. All right. I intend to rise before daylight. I shall take it down to the kitchen then. I would prefer not to trust you with that knife as long as I am on the premises."

Without answering, she turned toward the door.

"Wait!"

She halted, turned. He went to the hautboy, opened its top drawer, and took out a leather pouch. Metal rang as he emptied the pouch on the hautboy's top. From the same drawer he took a white handkerchief, held it on his palm, and swept some coins into it. He knotted the handkerchief, held it out to her. "Fifteen francs."

For a moment after she took it she longed desperately to unknot the handkerchief and toss its contents into his face. But she dared not raise his rage to its full pitch again. Besides, she thought grimly, fifteen francs was a lot of money. Her share of the money from the sale of the Dubois household goods, plus what she had managed to save from

her wages since coming to Taverne Ponselle, did not amount to fifteen francs. And without employment she was going to need money. In Paris this winter people without work were starving, and even many of the employed went hungry part of the time.

She thrust the handkerchief into her skirt pocket. It was a rich man's handkerchief, she had noted, made of fine cambric. And a rich man's handkerchief, she thought ironically, could be sold for enough to buy two meals for a poor person.

Did he expect her to curtsy and thank him? Did he expect her to beg him not to have her dismissed from her employment? She found that she could do neither. Not looking at him, she went out and closed the door behind her.

As she moved through a series of silent, dimly lighted hallways toward the big room above the kitchen, she was again aware of the blood on her thighs. Damaged goods, she thought bitterly, she who had hoped that her appearance, plus virginity, might be traded for wealth, and safety, and perhaps even for the possibility of revenge upon the man who had destroyed her family.

But because she had tried too soon for revenge, she had lost not just her virginity. She had lost employment which at least had kept her well-fed in a land where millions were as gaunt as those two prostitutes she had seen battling in the Street of the Baths.



AS ANGELIQUE ENTERED the attic room, dimly illuminated by the banked fire's glow rising through the open trapdoor, she saw Hortense rise to a sitting position on her pallet. "Angelique?"

"Yes."

"I was sure it was not Claudette. She always sleeps in Pon-

selle's room the nights she goes there. But where the hell have you been?"

When Angelique did not answer, Hortense went on, "I have never known you spend even part of the night away from your own bed."

Still Angelique did not answer, but just stood there, hands fumbling with the drawstring of her blouse. Hortense said, in a sharper tone, "Something is wrong, isn't it?"

Dimly Angelique saw the other girl get up from her pallet. A flint scraped. Then candlelight wavered in the big room with its steeply pitched roof. "Now, what is it, girl?"

Angelique said dully, "One of the guests asked me to come to his room. I went."

"And so?" Concern came into Hortense's long face. "He didn't beat you, did he?"

"No. He raped me."

"Raped you!" Hortense's mouth fell open. After a moment she went on, "How can you call it that? Good Lord, girl. Why did you think he wanted you to come to his room at this hour? To chat about the price of bread?"

Angelique said nothing.

Again the homely face changed. "Tell me, did you lose your maidenhead tonight?"

Eyes dull, Angelique nodded.

"Well, don't fret. You would have had to lose it sometime, unless you planned to die an old maid." Then: "Did he hurt you quite a lot?"

Angelique nodded.

"You're still bleeding?"

"I am not sure."

"Even if you are, it should stop soon. You will feel better after you undress and wash off. You can wash your clothes in the morning."

With the water in the washbasin Angelique sponged the blood from her thighs and then put on a clean shift which had been hanging from a hook near her pallet. After she lay down and drew the two blankets over her, Hortense blew the candle out.

In the darkness she asked, "How much did he pay you?"

"Fifteen francs."

"Fifteen francs! Why, that is a fortune, even if he was your first." She snickered. "The boy who got my maidenhead

was my cousin, and he gave me nothing. Not in the way of money, anyway. Just a kid."

"You have a child?"

"Yes, a boy four years old. He lives with his grandmother." She paused. "Who was he, this guest whose room you went to?"

"Richard Lansing."

"The Englishman who has been here several times?" Hortense gave a kind of groan. "And you are objecting? Why, I would pay *him* fifteen francs for an hour in his room—if I had fifteen francs, and if he would let me come there."

When Angelique made no reply, Hortense said, "There is something odd about all this. Just why did you go to Monsieur Lansing's room?"

In the morning, when Etienne Ponselle discharged her, Hortense and everyone here would learn about that confession of hers to attempted theft. But until she had to, Angelique did not want to talk about her supposed motive for going to the Englishman's room with a knife in her pocket, let alone her real motive.

The knife. Would Lansing really return it to the chopping block?

She said, "Please, Hortense, I don't want to talk about it, at least not tonight."

"All right," the older girl said good-naturedly. "Just don't brood, kid. As long as you have a roof over your head and food in your stomach, count yourself lucky."

She was silent for a few minutes and then asked, "What are you going to do with that fifteen francs?"

"Save it, I suppose."

"Well, don't worry about its being safe. Just put it under your mattress. No one ever comes up here but Claudette and me. And although we are not saints, we don't steal."

When Angelique awoke after three or four hours of troubled sleep, she saw that the window set into the slanting wall had turned gray. That, plus the sounds from below, told her that breakfast preparations had already begun. Swiftly she dressed and descended the ladder.

She turned to see Charles standing behind the long table, his omelet mixing bowl in one hand and a big wooden spoon in the other. Mustachios seeming to quiver with rage, he glared at her.

Her frightened gaze flew to the chopping block. With overwhelming relief she saw that Richard Lansing had kept his word about returning the knife. It lay about halfway in a line that stretched from the tiny knife Charles used to fillet her-ring to the cleaver with which he attacked a side of beef or lamb.

The cook bellowed, "Who do you think you are? Some fine lady who can lie abed half the morning?"

"Don't be such a grouch," Hortense said. She stood at the fireplace stirring a big pot of gruel. Claudette crouched beside her, holding a long-handled skillet filled with sausages over the flames. "The girl is only half an hour late. Besides, as I told you, she did not feel well last night."

Charles transferred his glare to Hortense for a moment. Then, furiously, he resumed whipping the omelet.

So it was only her lateness which had angered him. But that did not mean that Lansing had failed to carry out his announced intention of reporting her to Ponselle as a would-be thief. Probably it meant only that for the moment her employer was keeping the news to himself.

A few minutes later, steeling herself, she entered the taproom, a trayful of wooden bowls of gruel in her hands. One swift glance around the big room told her, to her relief, that the Englishman was not among those having breakfast. But then, she'd had no great reason to fear he might be, since he had spoken of leaving before daybreak.

Ponselle was there, though, standing with another man beside the fireplace, both of them with pipes in their hands. When she had finished distributing the bowls of gruel, she looked nervously at her employer and saw that he was gazing at her. There was nothing unusual in that. But did the sad brown eyes hold a different expression this morning? She could not be sure. Turning, she hurried back to the kitchen.

When she reentered the taproom, she saw that Ponselle was no longer there.

She did not see him again until, around four o'clock, she found him in the now-empty taproom, trimming the wicks of the oil lamps bracketed to the walls. Unwilling to bear the suspense any longer, she said, "Monsieur Ponselle."

He turned. "Yes, Angelique?"

"Before Monsieur Lansing left this morning, did he say anything about . . . about me?"

Definitely something different in the melancholy eyes. After a moment she identified it, with relief, as jealousy.

"I did not see Monsieur Lansing before he left. Today is Wednesday, remember."

In her agitation she did not at first realize what he meant. Then she remembered. On Wednesdays Ponselle rose at three o'clock in the morning, went down to the markets in the city, and ordered fish, meat, potatoes, and other root vegetables to be delivered to the inn. Therefore the Englishman had not had a chance to secure her dismissal from her employment.

But that did not mean he would not write to Ponselle from England.

Her employer said, unmistakable jealousy in his voice, "Why do you think he would have said anything about you?"

"I . . . I feared he had made a complaint, monsieur."

"A complaint?"

"I spilled wine on his coat sleeve last night. Even though I did my best to brush it away, he seemed angry. I was afraid he might have asked you to dismiss me."

The jealousy faded from his eyes. He gave one of his rare laughs. "Child, perhaps he was annoyed, but I am sure he was not really angry. Monsieur Lansing is a fine young gentleman, even if he is English. I am sure he would never try to have a serving girl dismissed merely because she had spilled some wine. Now, stop worrying about it."

"Very well, monsieur," she said, and walked back to the kitchen.

Days passed. Weeks. A month. Still she did not see Ponselle walk toward her, a letter in his hand and shock and outrage in his eyes, to tell her she was no longer in his employ. Why had Richard Lansing failed to send Ponselle a denunciation of her as a would-be thief? Was it because of that something she had sensed in him—a kind of compassion, perhaps even remorse—in the last moments before, bleeding and humiliated, she had left his room? Or was it just that, busy with other matters in his native island, he had decided that writing a letter would be too much trouble? As the winter wore on, her fear that Lansing would deprive her of her livelihood faded to the back of her mind.

It was a grim winter in which to be poor. She realized that sharply, despite the fact that she herself had plenty of food and, at the end of each sixteen-hour day, a warm place to

sleep. Even the prosperous merchants who came to Ponselle's for early-afternoon dinner were angry and uneasy about the state of France. Fewer of them, obviously, could afford the inn's excellent meals. Caught between high wholesale prices and customers who were scarcer and who had less and less money to spend, more and more Paris merchants dined with their families or in the city's less expensive cook shops.

As she served those who did still come to Ponselle's, she caught snatches of their conversation. With the whole country staggering under the burden of war debts, they said, those damnable stiff-necked, high-nosed nobles still resisted every effort to get them to pay any taxes at all. And Louis—poor, weak Louis XVI, always taking the advice of his beautiful but childish and silly wife—was letting them get away with it. Ponselle's customers, over their chicken or hare or mutton chops, assured each other heatedly that they would not be patient forever.

It was when she went down to Paris on her day off, though, that she could smell rebellion in the air. To her it seemed almost as distinct as the city's other odors of wine and coffee and moldering wood and plaster. She stayed away from such slums as the Street of the Baths. But even in the better streets there were ominous portents. Bread prices, posted in shop windows, were double what they had been when she first rode through Paris the previous fall. And people from the meaner streets were filtering in to mingle with the still-prosperous-looking shopkeepers and their wives. She saw thin, ragged youths of the sort who, she had heard, prowled through crowds in hope of filching purses, or handkerchiefs, or even a brass button off a coat. Sometimes prostitutes of the lowest class, made bold by hunger, moved along middle-class streets, the paint on their faces not hiding their emaciation.

More than once Angelique had felt a tug at her skirt. Looking down, she had seen each time the cupped hand and bony, beseeching face of a child. And each time, exasperated that they should beg from her, a franc-a-week serving wench, rather than some stout matron, and yet feeling a helpless pity tighten her stomach into a knot, she had taken one of her precious coins from her pocket and dropped it into the clawlike little fist.

Each time she came to the city she bought something.

Once, on a bitter February day, it had been a major purchase, a pair of woolen stockings for half a franc. Usually she bought something much less expensive—a ribbon for her hair, a bottle of glycerine and rosewater for her chapped hands, or a five-centime paper twist of sweets. But always before she returned to the inn she visited the window of a certain dressmaker's shop on the fashionable Rue de St. Honoré. Pasted against the glass was a drawing of a young woman in a hooded green cloak and dress, a graceful dress with a bodice shaped close to the figure and side panels framing the skirt. Below the drawing were printed words which, she was sure, gave the price.

Finally, one afternoon in March, she ventured into the shop. Its proprietor, a middle-aged brunette, did not hide her amusement at the sight of an illiterate girl in homespun blouse and skirt inquiring about such garments, but she gave the information cheerfully enough. For the sum of forty francs in advance, she would make the dress and cloak, guaranteeing completion within two weeks.

Forty francs! Almost as much as her year's wages at the inn, and more than twice as much as the store of francs—including the shameful fifteen francs the Englishman had contemptuously bestowed—she kept under her mattress. As Hortense had prophesied, it had proved to be a safe place.

Well, she thought as she turned to walk through a series of narrow streets, swept by a whining March wind, toward a north gate in the city wall, perhaps someday she would have a dress like that.

April came, stirring life in the daffodil bulbs buried on each side of the inn's main door, so that they sent green shoots up through the muddy soil. Over the city below, a green haze spread, a tender haze of unfolding tree leaves in squares and private courtyards and along the boulevards. But the spring brought no softening of the city's mood. Quite the contrary. Each time she went down into Paris, she saw more emaciated faces, more child beggars.

Finally she stopped going there. On her free days she walked along the dusty roads past the small farms of Montmartre and past the windmills turning briskly in the spring breeze. Other times during her free hours she mended her few garments, often in Madame Ponselle's room, while the invalid read aloud from the fables of Fontaine or the poetry

of Ronsard. Also during this time she again asked Madame Ponselle to write to the priest in St. Isidore. Hearing the inn's patrons talk about disorders in the country districts, with bands of homeless men and women attacking peasants scarcely better off than themselves, she worried about the safety of her mother and of her uncle and his family.

Father Jean-Paul's reply arrived in less than two weeks. All the people of Monsieur le Duc de Rhoulac's district, thanks to the good God, had been spared the attacks of roving outlaws. As for Angelique's mother, she remained as she had been all winter, seldom moving from a corner in her in-laws' kitchen, and speaking only if spoken to, and not always then.

All through early July the talk she heard in Ponselle's tap-room each night grew more feverish and militant. The king, she heard the patrons say, had listened to his wife again. At a time when people feared that outlaws ravaging the countryside might invade Paris, Marie Antoinette had persuaded Louis to withdraw his troops protecting Paris so that they might guard their own great palace at Versailles.

On the night of the thirteenth of July the tavern's patrons seemed especially excited. As she served wine to two of the inn's most frequent customers, a banker and an iron manufacturer, she heard the banker say, "We'll show His Majesty! If he won't protect Paris, then this new National Guard Lafayette has organized will!"

Her interest caught by the name of the young French hero of the American Revolution, Angelique stood motionless, the empty tray in her hand.

The manufacturer said, "I heard they've got new uniforms, combining red and blue and white."

"That's right. Red and blue because those are our civic colors, and Bourbon white to show that we still want to be loyal to Louis, in spite of that foreign bitch he married."

"And you say they have already gathered arms from all over the city?"

The banker nodded. "Tomorrow the citizens' committee and some of the guardsmen are going to take the arms stored at the Bastille."

Angelique's heart quickened. Often her walks from the city's northeastern gate to the banks of the Seine had taken her past the gloomy old prison. On her day off tomorrow she would go to the Place de la Bastille, and perhaps catch a

glimpse of the National Guardsmen in their new uniforms, and watch the searchers negotiate with the prison's governor.

By the time she reached the old prison the next day a sizable crowd had gathered in the cobblestoned square. With faint unease she noticed that now there were cannon in the embrasures of the prison's tall, round turrets, their barrels gleaming in the sunlight. She had seen no cannon the last time she came this way. Evidently the prison's governor had prepared for possible trouble. But as yet there seemed to be no hint of trouble. True, a gesticulating knot of guardsmen and men in civilian clothes stood at the prison gates, arguing with someone invisible to her, perhaps the prison's governor himself. But in other parts of the square guardsmen in their bright uniforms chatted with civilian men or flirted with giggling girls. They were working-class girls, to judge by their clothing, but each of them had adorned her costume with a ribbon or paper flower or some other bit of finery, as if this were a gala occasion. A few girls called provocative remarks up to the soldiers—Swiss mercenaries, Angelique heard someone say—who stood beside the cannon in the embrasures.

And then, beneath the talk and laughter, she became aware of others sounds. Tramp of many hundreds of feet, rumble of wheels over cobblestones, and human voices blending into a subdued roar. She whirled, looking along one street that emptied into the Place de la Bastille, and then along another. Down both streets surged a mass of shouting, fist-waving humanity, women as well as men. And with them came wheeled artillery pieces drawn by men in the new tricolor uniforms.

Rooted to the spot, Angelique looked at one stream of frenzied men and women, then the other. And then they were filling the square. These were no lawyers or merchants, no advocates of the "orderly change" she had heard her customers talk about at the tavern. These were gaunt men with hate-filled eyes, and frowsy-haired women screaming fury with mouths that were gap-toothed from years of near-starvation. Engulfed by the mob, she felt herself swept toward the prison gates. She heard musket fire and then the roar of cannon. The cannon mounted on the Bastille battlements, or the smaller ones drawn by the mob, or both? She did not know. She was only aware of the reek of gunpowder and that of the unwashed bodies hemming her in and still propelling her for-

ward, but apt at any moment to knock her down and trample her to death under hurrying feet.

She screamed, knowing it was useless, knowing that her scream was only one more sound in the hideous cacophony of yells, rattling musket fire, roaring cannon, and of something new, the crackle of flames. The mob must have forced the gates. They must be inside the prison, must have set fire to wooden buildings in the courtyard . . .

"Angelique!"

She knew she must have imagined that voice calling her name. And yet, trying desperately to keep on her feet despite the bodies hemming her in and hurrying her forward, she looked to her right. Her heart gave a wild leap of thanksgiving as she saw his dark, waving hair, his taut face, his dark blue eyes wide with tension. Jacques. Jacques Latour.

He struggled toward her, flailing out to his right and left like a swimmer in flotsam-choked water. He reached her, put his left arm around her, and with his right began to thrust their way through the mob. "Just hold on!" he shouted in her ear. "Before long we will be out of this."

It took at least ten minutes for them to get out. But at last they emerged from the square into a street that was comparatively quiet, even though ragged men and women, some of them carrying clubs, hurried along it toward the Bastille. As he and Angelique moved down the street, Jacques kept pushing against the wooden courtyard gates of private houses. At last he found a pair of them unbarred. He drew her inside, closed the gate. They were in a deserted cobblestoned courtyard with a well in its center and a willow tree trailing its lacy branches near the well's high coping. The windows of the house stared blankly down. If there were people up there, people who had been foolish enough to leave their gates unbarred, they were not going to compound their folly by appearing outside the house, or even at the windows, on this terrible day. Jacques led her to the well coping. "Just sit there," he said. "Rest. Don't talk."

She sank onto the coping. Half turned away from her, he listened to the distant roar in the Place de la Bastille. She looked at him. He seemed unchanged from the days when he often had taken supper with her and Marie and Simon and Claude. Dear Jacques, who had loved the gentle Christ, comforter of the poor and helpless, and so had studied for the

priesthood—only to discover that the Church of Louis XVI's France was dedicated to defending, not the weak, but the mighty.

For several minutes more he listened to the sounds from the ancient prison. Then he said, "I think we can leave without any trouble now."

He was wrong. Almost as soon as they emerged from the courtyard gates they became aware that part of the mob from the Place de la Bastille was surging down the street. One of the crowd carried something on a pike. After a moment, sick with horror, Angelique saw that it was a human head, gray locks straggling, eyes still wide with the ultimate terror, tongue lolling. Angelique cried, "Oh, dear God!"

He drew her back into the embrasure between the gateposts and covered her eyes with his hands. "Don't look!"

The frenzied, shouting crowd passed. Cheek pressed against Jacques's shoulder, she thought with a kind of weird detachment of how, as she moved between the tables in the tavern's taproom, she had felt such excited hope when she heard talk of "the coming change." She had thought of it as ushering in a beautiful new world where aristocratic huntsmen could not knock down young boys in their own laboriously cultivated fields, and where grief-crazed fathers could not be hung for grazing an aged nobleman's arm with a knife. She had never thought of "the change" bringing this, people with hate-distorted faces filling a narrow street from side to side, and carrying on a guardsman's pike the severed head of an old man.

Cheek still pressed against Jacques's shoulder, she asked, "Whose . . . Who was he?"

"The governor of the Bastille. The mob must have taken over the entire prison. God knows how many others are dead, on both sides." After a moment he added, "Come on."

Avoiding streets where looters had broken into shops, or where still more men and women were forming into shouting, singing crowds to march on the prison, Jacques led her on a zigzag course to the Seine. They crossed a bridge. On the Left Bank he led her down a narrow, curving street between rows of moldering houses, houses that looked as if they had been standing there for at least two hundred years.

He turned in at a shadowy doorway and led her, gasping now, up four flights of rickety stairs and through smells of cheap wine and cooking food and mildewed wood. Then, on

the top landing, he took an iron key from his coat pocket and unlocked a door.

As she crossed the threshold, she gained an instant impression of cleanliness and order, and of sunlight slanting through open windows onto worn but well-scrubbed floorboards. He said, "I have to go back to the Bastille. Wait for me here." He handed her the key. "Lock the door after me, and keep it locked."

"Wait! What is this place?"

"It is where I live." He moved out onto the landing. "Lock the door."

When he had gone, she looked around her. His living quarters consisted of one large room, probably an attic if this building had once been some rich family's private house. In the rear wall was a fireplace with a charcoal brazier standing inside it. Against the opposite wall, between two long windows, stood a bed with a coverlet of plain brown cloth. The only other items of furniture were a wooden table with two wooden stools drawn up to it, a tall chest of drawers, a washstand with basin and pitcher, a cupboard beside the fireplace, and, affixed to one wall, a long shelf holding books, a small hourglass, and a candle in its wooden candlestick.

She walked to one of the windows. From there she could see across the Seine and its bridges to the fine palaces and private mansions and public buildings lining the river's Right Bank. And she could see, farther away, a column of smoke rising from what she knew must be the Bastille. But at this distance she could not hear the hideous sounds that still must be rising, like the smoke, into the summer air. The roar of cannon, unless those Swiss cannoneers had been completely overpowered by now. The crackle of flames and rattle of musket fire. The groans of those wounded by bullets or perhaps trampled underfoot. And—somehow ugliest of all—the hate-filled howls of the mob.

Even though she could see that column of smoke, she now felt many miles away from the violence in that ancient square. Here in this big, plain room she had a sense of quietness and privacy such as she had never known before in her eighteen years of life.

She saw from the slant of the sun that it must be midafternoon. She'd had nothing to eat since her early breakfast at the inn. She went to the cupboard beside the fireplace and

opened its doors. Several pewter plates and mugs and wooden bowls. A tin box containing a loaf of bread. On a wooden platter a round of cheese, with only one small wedge gone.

In the cupboard's drawer she found knives and some wooden spoons. She cut a slice of bread, placed on it a slice of cheese, and, chewing, walked over to the shelf of books to look at the printed words on their spines and wonder what they meant.

9

SUNLIGHT HAD WITHDRAWN completely from the big room by the time she heard Jacques out on the landing, calling her name. She turned the key in the lock. When he came in, looking tired and yet excited, she sensed in him a mixture of emotions, a feeling of triumph mingled with uneasiness, even fear. He placed the paper-wrapped parcel he carried—sausages for supper, he explained—in the cupboard beside the fireplace. Then they sat opposite each other at the table.

The Bastille's fall was complete, he told her. All the Swiss guards had surrendered. The rioters were still celebrating, even though scores of their own numbers had died in the taking of the prison.

She shuddered. "That . . . that man whose head . . ."

"You mean, was there any more of that sort of thing? Yes, I am afraid so. I was at the Hôtel de Ville late this afternoon." Angelique knew that the Hôtel de Ville was Paris' city hall. "A mob caught the mayor on the steps, and killed him, and afterward . . . treated his body in the same way."

She drew in her breath sharply. After several moments she asked, "Why was it you were at the Hôtel de Ville?"

"A new citizens' committee has been formed."

She nodded, knowing it must be the committee she had heard the inn's patrons talking about the night before.

He went on, "I am a member of that committee. I am the

only member from a peasant family. I suppose it is because of my newspaper that I am acceptable to all those merchants and lawyers on the committee."

"Newspaper?"

"A weekly. I print it on a press owned by a Right Bank coal merchant."

She said slowly, "You have had quite a lot to do with this . . . this revolt today, haven't you?"

"It was not just a revolt." His voice was quiet. "What happened today was the start of a revolution. And yes, I am one of those who have talked and written of revolution, even though I did not know just what form its first stages would take. I only knew that changes *must* come to France, taxation reforms, and changes in the manorial system and in the Church. And I felt that such reforms would never come about unless, by use of force, we showed the aristocracy and that poor spineless king of ours that we would be patient no longer."

"But, Jacques! It was so terrible today. I don't mean just that people died. I mean the way at least two men were treated after they were killed. And then those men and women and even children, singing and shouting as they followed that pikesman with . . . with . . ."

"I know. Savagery. A savagery that has festered inside the French poor through decades of mistreatment. I hope that today has drained off most of that savagery."

"But maybe it has not," he went on. Anxiety was plain in his dark blue eyes. "Perhaps today was just a foretaste of the savagery that lies ahead. In that case, perhaps all that I have worked for, dreamed of, will have come to worse than nothing."

He broke off and then said, "But let us not talk of that now. I must hear about you. How on earth is it that you are in Paris?"

"I work here, or at least I work in Montmartre. I have been a serving wench in a tavern since last October."

He looked dumbfounded. "Do you mean that Simon and Marie allowed you, a seventeen-year-old girl, to come alone to Paris?"

After a moment she said, from a tight throat, "Then you do not know what happened to my family?"

"Happened?" His face darkened with concern. "Why, no."

Once or twice I wrote to the intendant in St. Isidore. He wrote back that there had been no disturbances in the de Rhoulac manorial district, and so I assumed that the Dubois family was still all right."

"Perhaps the intendant could not bring himself to tell you, knowing that you were a cousin of my father's."

"Perhaps. But you tell me now."

She did. Claude's death, and then Simon's, and then Marie's retreat into a mindless stupor. "There was no room for me at my uncle's house, and so I came to Paris and took employment at the Taverne Ponselle."

He said in a constricted voice, "Oh, Angelique. My little Angelique."

He was silent for several seconds. Then he said, "But that tavern would be no place for you, not even in normal times, and these are far from normal. God knows what lies ahead. You must be protected. Come here to live, Angelique."

"Here!"

"Yes. I can buy food for us both." He paused, and then went on, "If you wish to be married, then we will marry. It is not for lack of love for you that I make my proposal in this lukewarm fashion. I have loved you for at least two years now. But I have deliberately taken a dangerous path in life. I doubt that the king will send his troops to punish Parisians for taking the Bastille, at least not right away. He is too indecisive for that. But he might send military force in the future, and if so, I would be one of the first arrested. As my wife, you probably would be arrested too. But I must take care of you, Angelique. And so, if you will live here . . ."

"I would like to live here," she said in a low voice. Her gaze was directed down at the table. "But as for marriage . . . Well, there is another reason why you might not want to marry me, now or ever."

"Not *want* to? I cannot imagine a reason other than concern for your welfare that might keep me from wanting to . . ." He broke off. After a long moment he asked quietly, "You mean there is some man, don't you? Do you love him?"

"Love him! Oh, God, no! He's the man I told you about, the Englishman who shoved Claude backward onto that rock."

He asked in a taut voice, "How is it you met him again?"

"He stayed at the inn one night. He did not recognize me

because he had caught, at most, just a glimpse of me that day in the wheat field. But I recognized him."

In a low voice, sometimes faltering, sometimes hurried, she went on speaking there in the darkening room. She told of Richard Lansing's invitation and the wild, foolish plan for revenge that had leaped into her mind. She told of how in Lansing's room, seconds after she had realized she could never stab anyone, the Englishman had demanded to know what she had intended to do with that knife.

"I . . . I was afraid he would charge me with attempted murder. And so I said the only thing I could think of. I said that I had planned to use the knife to get at money he carried in his saddlebags. He threw me on the bed and . . ."

She broke off, and then added dully, "In the morning he was gone."

As she talked, Jacques had sat with his hands on the table, palms upward and with fingers slightly curled. He was staring down at them now. Angelique felt that she could guess what he was thinking. If, right now, he had the Englishman's neck between his two hands . . .

After a moment he said in a flat voice, "Well, perhaps someday your Englishman and I will meet." He turned his hands palm downward. "But what of us, Angelique? Will you stay here with me?"

"You mean, what I have told you makes no—"

"Of course it makes no difference! It is . . . it is terribly painful to learn what has happened to you. But it in no way makes me love you less, nor does it alter my desire to marry you just as soon as it is safe for you to become my wife." He paused. "Well, Angelique?"

"Of course I want to stay here."

Overwhelming joy leaped into his eyes. But for the moment all he said was, "I had best light a candle. It is getting dark in here."

He rose and went to the wall shelf, where a flint box rested beside the candle in its wooden holder. As he was lighting the candle, she left the table to stand beside him.

"Have you read all those books?"

"Yes, more than once."

"How wonderful it must be to be able to read."

In the candlelight his face was both tender and amused. "You will be able to. I shall teach you." Then his face

changed. Hands framing her face, he kissed her lips. His arms went around her, holding her close to him. He asked in an oddly roughened voice, "Angelique?"

"Yes, Jacques."

Over by the bed between the two long windows he undressed her, undressed himself. They lay naked in the mingled light of the candle and the faint afterglow coming through the windows. He wooed her gently, kissing her eyelids and mouth and throat and pink-nippled breasts, running his hand over her flat stomach and triangle of yellow hair and down her long, slender legs.

When he entered her, she felt discomfort, not a great deal, but enough to remind her of the rending pain she had experienced on the Englishman's bed. Then even the slight discomfort was gone. It was not replaced, though, by wild, fevered pleasure of the sort she had heard Hortense and Claudette discuss as they all three lay in the darkened room above the inn's kitchen. All she felt was tenderness for Jacques and the hope that she was pleasing him.

A few minutes later, holding her close, he asked, "Did you find it pleasurable, my darling?"

She hesitated and then said, "Yes."

His voice was rueful. "I think you mean 'not very.' " Then he gave a soft laugh. "But I shall teach you pleasure. Pleasure, and reading, and writing. But right now I am sure we are both hungry. I will kindle a fire in the brasier, and we will have sausages and cheese and wine."

Hours later she lay in bed beside the sleeping man. The streets below this big airy room were quiet now, except for an occasional distant shout or the sound of voices singing. Students, probably. She had heard that young men flocked from all over the world to the university of Paris' Left Bank, where many of them spent more time in wine shops than over their books. Perhaps tonight the district was so quiet because most of the rowdier students had flocked to the Bastille. A glow of flames in the now-overcast night sky still marked the spot of the old prison, but she had no way of knowing whether the flames were those of the ancient structure itself or of bonfires lit by celebrating Parisians in the Bastille's cobblestoned square.

Tomorrow she would cross the river and make her way through the city to Ponselle's inn. She would retrieve her

clothes and the small store of francs from beneath her mattress and say good-bye to the people with whom she had lived and worked for so many months.

Beside her, Jacques sighed in his sleep and turned over on his back. Enough moonlight, diffused by the sky's cloud cover, came through the window for her to see his handsome face with its wide forehead, straight nose, and sensitive mouth. Dear Jacques. Except for him she very likely would have died this morning. Instead she lay beside him in a place cleaner, airier, and more comfortable than any she had ever occupied.

Did the tenderness and respect she felt for him add up to love? Perhaps. Then should she give it up, that gaudy dream of achieving riches and power, and marry Jacques as soon as he felt it was safe for her to do so? Perhaps. And perhaps that was what she would do.

10

JACQUES INSISTED EARLY the next morning on accompanying her on her walk across Paris to Montmartre. Soon she saw it would have been folly to have tried to make the journey alone. Paris—at least the poor and ragged part of Paris—was still celebrating the Bastille's fall. Outside the broken windows of looted wine shops men and women drank, and sang, and shouted, "*A bas la noblesse!*" Jacques and Angelique avoided the Bastille, but when she looked down a street to the square in front of the prison, she saw milling civilians and National Guardsmen, and aproned workmen who trundled wheelbarrows.

"At the Hôtel de Ville yesterday afternoon," Jacques said, "I learned that they are going to tear the prison down, starting today. Some of the stones are going to be used to finish the Pont de la Concorde." That was the new bridge being

built over the Seine. "The idea is," he went on, "that when people cross the bridge they will be trampling on symbols of the despotism they overthrew."

Yes, Paris was jubilant, all right. But Angelique noticed that there was still no activity around the silent and shuttered shops and factories which, during the past harsh winter, had closed down for lack of business. The people at the moment might be gloriously drunk on triumph and looted wine, but they were still gaunt with hunger. On one street she saw a small child let go of the skirts of his reeling, shouting mother, dive into the filthy gutter for a crust of bread, and devour it.

She asked, "Jacques, will people really have more employment now? And will the price of bread come down?"

"Eventually. At least that is what we must hope."

Just before they reached the northeastern gate in the town wall, he stopped, saying that he would wait for her there. "And it would be just as well not to tell the people at the inn who I am. If the old regime should finally regain complete power, which God forbid, I might have to flee Paris, and you might have to go back to work there. And by that time Ponselle might have been forbidden to hire anyone ever mixed up with a dangerous character like me."

She walked alone through the gate, where the soldier on duty, who often had seen her pass his station on her day off, winked and smiled at her. Although a member of the regular army, he seemed as happy as any National Guardsman this morning. Angelique recalled hearing customers at the inn say that the army was so shot through with antiroyalist feeling that the king would not dare send his troops against the people of Paris, lest they wheel about and point their muskets at His Majesty.

When she entered the inn's kitchen she saw that preparations for the early-afternoon dinner had already begun. Claudette and Hortense greeted her with glad cries. Even the terrible Charles looked relieved.

Claudette said, "We were sure you had been caught up in the rioting and killed, or at least badly hurt. In fact, when he learned you had not come back last night, Monsieur Ponselle sent both of the stable boys down to inquire for you at the hospitals."

"I am quite all right. I . . . I met an old friend of mine

from my village. As a matter of fact, we are going to be married."

Better not say that the marriage would take place at some indefinite time in the future, because that would involve explaining the reason for the delay.

Hortense asked, "Is he good-looking?" Claudette asked, "Is he rich?"

Angelique laughed. "Good-looking, yes. Rich, not at all."

She looked at Charles. He, who had never called her anything but "you," stretched his lips into what he plainly intended to be a smile and said, "*Bonne chance*, Angelique." Then, as if to make up for his momentary softness, he brought his cleaver down on the neck of the dead, naked goose stretched out before him with almost enough force to split the butcher's block.

Behind her someone cleared his throat. She turned to see Etienne Ponselle's sad hound's face. He said, "So you are to be married."

"Yes, monsieur."

No doubt he had heard her reply to Claudette. And no doubt he remembered the frosty December night when she had told him that she intended to link her fortunes to a man both rich and powerful. But he did not remind her of that night. Instead he said, "I hope this man is worthy of you."

"He is, and more." She paused. "I will get my things now, and then say good-bye to Madame Ponselle."

She shook hands with Monsieur Ponselle and Charles, kissed Claudette and Hortense on the cheek, and kissed the two little scullions, who had been listening avidly to the adult conversation, on their smoke-smudged foreheads. She was going to miss all of them, she realized, even that ever-rumbling volcano of a cook.

In Madame Ponselle's room she told the invalid the news and then said, "He is going to teach me to read and write!"

"Then he is an educated man, this fiancé of yours?"

"Yes, he studied for the priesthood, but left before taking his final vows."

The woman obviously had questions about this almost-priest who was to marry her husband's serving wench, but she was too well-bred to ask them. She said, "As soon as you have learned to write, send me a letter, You will find me a good correspondent. I have little else to do."

Months later, after her life turned into a desperate, ugly struggle for mere survival, Angelique was to look back on those days spent with Jacques as a halcyon period. The attic room they shared was like the top of an island in a storm-lashed sea. In that airy place there was quiet, serenity, cleanliness. Outside was chaos. Angelique became sharply aware that even on the building's lower floors there was wretchedness, want, and depravity. Often as she climbed up the four flights of stairs after a visit to the food shops or to the well in the courtyard behind the house, she heard from behind closed doors drunken voices quarreling, or the crash of some flung object, or a man's enraged bellow followed by a cry of pain from a woman or child. On the landing one flight below the top one she often saw that the door was ajar, with someone's dark, sullen eye staring out at her.

The family who lived there was named Ribeaux, Jacques told her, and it would be best to have nothing to do with them. Dark and undersized, they all had a wizened look, even the three boys, who ranged in age from about ten to fourteen. The husband was a cutpurse, roaming after dark to rob pedestrians who ventured down lonely streets. The woman, an ex-prostitute, was now a beggar, and when the opportunity arose, a petty thief. Their sons were already skilled pickpockets.

The Ribeaux family were far, far from being the only lawbreakers in Paris. Once-respectable working people were turning to crime because their condition had become worse, not better, since the day they had celebrated the Bastille's fall. Because so many of the nobility had fled to other countries, more and more of the manufacturers who once had met the aristocrats' demands for silks, fine porcelains, and other luxuries had been forced to close, thus swelling the numbers of unemployed. To make matters worse for wage earners, the body of merchants and bankers and lawyers, called the National Assembly, who now governed France had outlawed the guilds and workingmen's associations, which at least had given them some strength to fight for more than starvation wages.

Because of the growing influence of his newspaper, Jacques was one member of the former citizens' committee who had won a seat in the National Assembly. By public coach he

traveled the fifteen miles to Versailles three days a week to sit with his fellow assemblymen.

One September night after he returned pale and weary from Versailles, he and Angelique went to bed early. As they lay in the darkness he said, "I keep telling those fine gentlemen that it has been mostly workingmen who have given their lives to the revolution, and therefore the working class must have some of the revolution's benefits. Otherwise these merchants and bankers may find themselves wading knee-deep in blood, mostly their own. But they will not listen. And now this scheme about the Church . . ."

"What scheme?"

"They are closing the monasteries and confiscating all Church lands. Considering the way the Church in France has acted, there might be some justice in that—if the land was going to be used for the public good, or sold at prices the peasants could pay. Instead the land is to be sold in huge blocs to the only sort who can afford to buy it, the sort of men I sat with in the Assembly today."

A chill premonition touched her. "Jacques, don't make them too angry."

"Don't worry, my darling. As long as I have my newspaper, they will be afraid to move against me."

Would they? The pen was mightier than the sword, she had heard Jacques say. But could the pen prevail against the combined power of some of the nation's richest men?

"Now, don't *worry*." He drew her close, kissed her mouth, her bare shoulder. Then he said, lips close to her ear, "Dearest?"

She touched his cheek. "Yes, Jacques."

As always, she found his lovemaking not irksome, even mildly pleasant. But after he had lifted his weight from her body and lay beside her, she sensed a sadness in his silence.

"Jacques, is something wrong?"

"Not wrong. It is just that I wish you . . . felt differently about my making love to you."

"But, Jacques! Do I ever refuse you? And if there is something you want me to do . . ."

"No, no! You must let your instincts guide your responses to me. I could not bear it if you began to pretend . . ."

He broke off, and then said, "It is all right, my darling."

Some women by nature are . . . less responsive than others. But I love you, Angelique, just as you are."

"Are you sure?"

He laughed. "Of late I have grown less sure of a number of things. But of that I will always be certain."

Reassured, she relaxed. After a moment she said, "I was thinking today. What if I become pregnant?"

"In that case, I suppose you would have to become my wife, no matter what the risk." He propped himself on one elbow. "Angelique! Are you pregnant?"

"No."

"You are certain?"

"Off course. Peasant girls learn about such matters while they are still children. And if I had not learned such things at home, I would certainly have learned them from Claudette and Hortense! Just because I was ignorant of books, you need not think I have been ignorant of womanly matters."

Again he laughed. "And now you are not even ignorant of books, are you?"

She was not. Since she had come here to live she had learned to write simple sentences, and to read well enough to understand most of the articles in Jacques's newspaper. Because he had two volumes written in English on his shelf, she told him that she would like to learn that language too. He told her that his books in English, volumes of philosophy by someone named Locke, would be far too difficult for her. The next evening, though, he brought home an English grammar, the sort, he said, from which French children learned English.

While they were at supper the next night she had told him of her delighted discovery that many French and English words were the same, or at least almost the same.

He had smiled. "That is because the Normans carried the French language to England, where it joined with the Anglo-Saxon tongue to become what we now know as the English language."

She asked, chin propped on her hands, blue eyes wide and eager, "Who were the Normans?"

Jacques was a born teacher. She was a born pupil, lapping up knowledge as a hungry kitten laps up cream. She listened with delight as he told her how the Duke of Normandy, illegitimate son of a tanner's daughter, had invaded the British Isles, declared himself King William, and welded warring

tribes into a nation which, eventually, had grown into France's powerful rival.

Besides reading, writing, and such impromptu lessons in history, Jacques taught her simple arithmetic. But somehow long division and fractions were beyond her, and remained so all her life.

The days shortened. Because of ever-growing disorders in the countryside, the harvest was scanty, and therefore bread prices soared even higher. Early in October, as she stood one drizzly morning in a bread queue, she heard the other women angrily discussing the latest rumor. Agents of the king, they said, had been buying up most of the bread in Paris, so that he could give a great banquet for his troops stationed at Versailles.

"The king should not be allowed to stay in Versailles!" one woman said. "He should be here, in the midst of most of his subjects."

"Things are not his fault," another woman said. "They are the fault of that Austrian bitch he married."

"Then bring her here too," the first woman said. "Bring them all here and put them in the Tuileries, where we can keep an eye on them." Often on her day off from the inn Angelique had wandered past the Tuileries, a gloomy old Right Bank palace unoccupied since the reign of Catherine de Medici.

Angelique thought no more of the women's talk than of other wild talk she heard each day in the queues. She finished her shopping, and pleased that she had been able to buy two small perch from a fisherman's stall along the Seine, went back to her attic aerie, climbing the rickety stairs through the various levels of noise and smells. On the next-to-last landing the door of the Ribeaux family was open a crack and a black eye—that of the youngest boy, to judge by its height above the floor—looked malevolently out at her. At least, she thought, unlocking her own door, they were a quiet family. Ominously quiet, perhaps, but still quiet. She would have hated to have a wife-beater on the floor below.

A few days after that a late-afternoon wind blowing from the Right Bank carried the sound of musket fire and a subdued roar of hundreds of voices crying out in what might have been triumph or rage. Because of her experiences at the Bastille, she had always obeyed Jacques's injunction not to

venture into the streets if she heard sounds of disorder. But as darkness descended and the sands in the hourglass on the bookshelf told her that it was long past the usual time of Jacques's return, her anxiety mounted. Even though this was one of his days to attend the Assembly at Versailles, perhaps he had stopped at the print shop before returning home. She had put on her shawl and was about to go out to look for him when she heard his familiar knock on the door. He came in, his face white and grim in the candlelight.

"Jacques! What is it?"

He told her. Incredibly, yesterday and today some women of Paris had done exactly what those in the bread queue had been discussing. Eight thousand women from the city's poorest districts, accompanied by a few men, had left the city at six in the morning to march to Versailles. At dawn the next day, after a night spent drinking and singing and speech-making in a field near the palace, they had invaded the royal apartments. Louis, of course, did what they demanded. Trying to hold on to his dignity, trying to pretend that it was out of love for him that his people wanted him in the city, the king took to the road with his much-hated wife and his small son and daughter. Around the royal coach marched the raucous women, waving poplar branches they had cut from roadside trees.

What Jacques did not tell her—what she did not learn until she heard talk of it in the queues the next day—was that the men of the mob had brandished, not poplar branches, but pikes bearing the severed heads of the king's guard.

She asked, "Where are the king and his family now?"

"In the Tuileries. They arrived there less than an hour ago."

"Will there be more bread now? Will things be better?"

"Not really." He sank onto one of the stools at the table. "But those explosions of blood lust at least make the poor feel better for a while. No, darling," he said, as she moved toward the pot of vegetable ragout on the brazier, "I am not hungry. I stopped at an inn just outside Paris."

Even though she did not yet know about those severed heads, Angelique suspected that it was the events of the day, not supper at an inn, which had blunted his appetite.

He smiled as she turned back to him. "At least I no longer will have to journey to Versailles. Apparently the government

intends to maintain the fiction that Louis is still the head of state. That means that the Assembly will meet here in Paris, now that the king is to live in the Tuileries."

Despite chaos and suffering all around her, she enjoyed being alive that winter of 1789. Especially pleasant were the Sundays when she and Jacques crossed the river to stroll down the Right Bank's fine shopping streets, and through its parks, and past the Tuileries, where the king and his family lived in uneasy splendor, trying to pretend that they were still rulers rather than luxuriously kept prisoners.

More than a week after one such excursion, a young boy delivered a muslin-wrapped parcel to the attic room. To her half-incredulous delight, inside was the green hooded cloak and green dress she had desired so much.

That night Jacques laughed and said, "How did I know you wanted them? Every time we have passed that shop you have turned your head to sneak a look at that drawing in the window."

"But, Jacques! Can you afford it?"

"When I saw that longing in your eyes, I felt I could not afford *not* to buy it for you."

After that, when they walked through the splendid parts of Paris, Angelique was able to feel rather splendid herself.

But she enjoyed her everyday life, too. She loved keeping that attic room neat and fresh. She felt proud that she could read almost every word in Jacques' newspaper, and all of his copy of Fontaine's *Fables*, and most of the Bible. At night there was Jacques across the supper table from her, his sensitive face showing disgust or approval or humor as he spoke of that day's debates in the Assembly, which now met in the former riding school of that old palace across the river. And in bed there was Jacques murmuring love words to her, stroking and kissing her, gently entering her body, and then lying upon her, spent, for a moment or two before withdrawing.

One night after he had made love to her he said, "You are like a kitten, aren't you? You just like to be petted. I guess you will always be a kitten."

Even though he had spoken gently, even humorously, again she sensed a sadness in him. She asked uncertainly, "And you do not like my being . . . what you call a kitten?"

After a moment he pulled her close to him. "Oh, sweetheart! Whatever you are, you are the loveliest creature a

man ever had in his bed. And wouldn't I be a fool and an ingrate to wish you to be any different from what you are?"

Thus she could pretend some of the time that the only reality was this big quiet room. Paris, with its growing hunger, its increasingly ruthless hostility between classes, did not exist.

Then, on a bitter day in March, the reality of that cruel, turbulent Paris burst into that fifth-floor room.

Angelique returned that day from an afternoon of food shopping to find a white-faced Jacques there. He had placed his small hand trunk on the bed and was stuffing into it, not only clothing, but handwritten papers and printed pamphlets.

"Jacques! What are—?"

"I must leave Paris before I am arrested."

"Arrested! What for?"

"I am to be arrested tomorrow as a plotter against the Assembly, and as a secret agent of the king and the pope."

If she had not been so frightened, she would have laughed. "How could you be? You are the last person in the world to—"

"Yes, and they know it, the ones who have planned my arrest." He closed the hand trunk and sat down on the bed's edge. "Come here, my darling."

When she sat beside him, with his arm around her shoulders, he said, "Quite a few men in the Assembly want to be rid of me. I am a gadfly, a nuisance, always urging them to share some of their wealth and power with the working-class men and women who have helped them curb the aristocracy. But they cannot have me arrested for *that*. And so they have concocted this other story."

"But no one will believe it! How could you be in league with the pope? You left the monastery, left the Church."

"That fits right in with their charges, my darling. They will say that my apparent leaving of the Church was just a ruse, a way of gaining the confidence of the Church's enemies so that I could work more effectively against them."

"But no one will believe that!"

"Oh, yes, they will. People, especially Frenchmen, love to believe in plots, the more farfetched the better. My printing shop will be raided tomorrow. Secret correspondence of some sort will be found—surely correspondence with Rome, and perhaps with one of the more hated aristocrats close to the king, the Comte d'Artois, for instance. The correspondence

will concern God only knows what evil plans against the people of Paris—plans to poison the public wells, perhaps. For many centuries, such allegations against the Jews have always been good for a pogrom or two.

"Oh, yes," he went on, "if I stay here I will be arrested, all right. Whether or not I actually reach prison is another matter."

It took her a moment to realize what he meant. Then she gave a wild cry. She visualized a Paris mob surrounding the guardsmen leading him to prison, imagined the guardsmen, after perhaps a token resistance, allowing the frenzied crowd to take him. And then Jacques, her Jacques, hanging from a street lantern, and perhaps later . . .

He shook her shoulders. "Stop it, Angelique. If you love me at all, my darling, try to be calm now."

She took several deep, shuddering breaths and then said, "How did you know about what they are planning to do to you?"

"A fellow assemblyman told me. He has not had the courage to support me publicly, at least not of late, but he did find the courage to warn me."

She said, "Shouldn't we leave right now?"

"You are not coming with me, dearest. I have decided that not just for your sake, but my own. I can slip across the border to the Netherlands more easily if I am alone. But if you do come with me and are caught, do you think that the Paris mob, in its present mood, would spare you?"

He crossed the room, knelt before the fireplace, and reached up inside the chimney. Knowing the reason for his actions, she went over to stand beside him. In a chiseled-out space behind a loose brick, they kept their money—the francs she had brought with her from the Taverne Ponselle plus whatever they had saved from his assemblyman's salary and the earnings of his newspaper.

He took down the bag of coins and counted out twenty francs. "That should do for me until I can find a way of acquiring more. The rest is for you."

"But you are leaving most of it for me!"

"That is still less than two hundred francs, my darling. You will find that it is not much." He replaced the chamois-skin bag, dropped the twenty francs into his pocket, and stood up, brushing his hands together. "At least you can

spend all your money on food. I have already paid the next quarter's rent.

"Now, tomorrow," he went on, "you can expect a visit from National Guardsmen."

"Guardsmen!"

"They will be looking for me, of course. I pray they will consider you stupid as well as young. Tell them you have been living here as my *petite amie*. Pretend that you have only the vaguest knowledge about me, just that I do something or other in the government. Tell them just that you waited for me to come home last night, but I did not. Can you do all that?"

She managed to nod.

"My darling, unless I am able to send for you soon—and I will, the moment I can—I am afraid you will have to find employment before long. Now that you can write and read and have some knowledge of arithmetic, you might be hired by some shopkeeper as a clerk. If not, it would be best to go back to Ponselle's inn. From what you have told me, there are good people there who would try to watch out for you."

No, she thought, not Ponselle's. Richard Lansing might come back there. After his brutal treatment of her, she had stayed on at the inn partly because the shock had left her crushed, almost apathetic, and partly because she knew how the unemployed were suffering that cruel winter. But she was a little older now, and much better educated. Surely, if the need arose, she would be able to find a number of employers willing to hire her.

It was plain that Jacques, looking down at her face, had divined at least part of her thoughts. "I doubt that the Englishman will turn up at Ponselle's or anyplace in Paris very soon again," he said grimly. "Foreign aristocrats no doubt are still welcome at country châteaux. But I think it will be a long time before a titled gentleman of any nationality will feel comfortable on the streets of Paris."

"Now, one more important thing. As long as you are here, keep the door locked. Never open it unless you know who is on the other side. And never stay out after darkness falls. Will you promise me that, my darling?"

She nodded, and began to cry. Tears sprang to his own eyes. They held each other close, weeping.

That night, after he had gone, she sat at the table with a

candle and an outspread book before her, but unable to read. She felt dazed. How could one's life change so completely in just a few hours? This afternoon she had hurried home from the butcher shop, pleased with the bit of mutton she had managed to buy, and happy in the thought of how Jacques would enjoy it. And now she sat all alone behind a locked door at the top of a moldering house, with nighttime Paris—contradictory Paris, by turns exuberant or sullen, dancing in triumph or howling with hate—stretching darkly away all around her.

11

THE NATIONAL GUARDSMEN arrived around eleven the next day, tramping noisily up the stairs and rapping a musket butt against the door. She turned the key in the lock and they came in, two men of about twenty-five with coarse-featured but not unpleasant faces. When they demanded to know where Jacques Latour was, she stammered out, feeling almost as frightened as she sounded, that she did not know. She had expected him to return home as usual the night before, but he had not.

"You are his wife?" the taller man asked.

She cast her eyes down. "No, monsieur. We were not married."

They searched the big room, apparently for incriminating documents as well as the fugitive, because they not only looked under the bed and into the wardrobe but leafed through the shelf of books too. When the shorter guardsman knelt at the fireplace and looked up the chimney, her nerves contracted with the fear that he would notice the loose brick which concealed that hoard of francs. After a moment, though, he got to his feet.

"I guess we might as well go now." But instead of moving toward the door, he looked at Angelique. "Well, my little

one, what are you going to do, now that your lover has deserted you?"

She said, after a moment, "I have sent word to my parents. They are willing to let me come home."

"Where is home?"

"Across the river in the Faubourg Saint Antoine. My family lives above the butcher shop where my two brothers work." She paused. "They are coming to fetch me home around noon today."

The guardsmen looked at each other. "Two brothers," the taller man said.

"Both butchers," his companion said. "Well, good day, mademoiselle." They tramped down the stairs.

Half an hour later, dressed in the green gown and cloak, she went out to seek employment. Since she hoped to be hired by some fashionable shop, it was best that she herself look as smart as possible.

Before dark, with a cold knot of unease in her stomach, she climbed the stairs to that silent room. No one had hired her, although the elderly proprietor of a book shop had patted her cheek and said he certainly wished he could afford to.

Finally the woman owner of a hat shop had said, "My dear, except for experience, you seem to have every qualification for employment in a shop. But do you realize that in these times there are about ten applicants for every such position? And many of those applicants do have experience."

For a week she went from shop to shop. No one had a place for her. Although she tried to eat as little as possible, walking for many hours each day made her hungry, with the result that she found herself buying almost as much food as she had for both herself and Jacques.

Finally, dressed not in the green dress and cloak but in her old blue blouse and skirt and red shawl, she crossed the river one icy morning and walked across Right Bank Paris to the northeastern gate. Etienne Ponselle would not only give her employment. He and the others would be glad to see her. Almost six weeks earlier she had written a letter to Madame Ponselle. In her reply the invalid had said, "All of us miss you and would love to have you visit us."

As for Richard Lansing—well, she would just cling to Jac-

ques's belief that the Englishman was unlikely to appear soon at Ponselle's or anywhere else on this side of the channel.

The soldier who used to be on duty much of the time at the gate was still there. That seemed to her a favorable omen. He was busy arguing with the driver of an ox-drawn cart, and so she merely smiled at him. Then she turned left on the road and moved past fields glittering with frost under the morning sun, past winter-bare vineyards, and windmills whose sails were almost motionless on this still day. She reached the inn's gate.

It was padlocked, and on it a wooden sign in painted black letters, "Closed."

In bewilderment she lifted her gaze from the sign to the shuttered upper stories of the inn. How could it be closed? Why, once Monsieur Ponselle had told her that he and his father before him had kept the tavern in continuous operation for the past sixty years.

A creaking sound. She turned her head. A cart loaded with hay and drawn by a spavined roan was approaching. Its driver looked as decrepit as his horse. He drew rein beside her, gave her a toothless grin, and said, "The inn is closed."

She looked up at him dully. "Why? Why did they close?"

"Had to. Gang of thieves with clubs and pistols broke into the place one night. They took Ponselle's safe and the food and wine stored in the cellar. Robbed the guests, too. The thieves were about to leave when that cook Ponselle had said something that made them angry. They set a fire. It gutted the taproom before a fire company got here to put the fire out."

She asked in that same dull voice, "Where did Monsieur and Madame Ponselle go?"

"To Rheims. Her family owns a big vineyard there."

"And the people who worked here? Where did they go?"

He shrugged. "Who can say?" After a moment he added, "Where are you bound for?"

"Back to the northeast gate, I guess."

"Climb up. I am driving past there."

As the cart creaked forward, he said, "It was bound to happen sooner or later to a place like that outside the walls. Though God knows plenty of places in Paris have been looted out of business."

Looking at his cheerful face, Angelique thought of some

words of a writer named La Rochefoucauld which Jacques had once quoted to her: "We all have enough strength to bear the misfortunes of others."

Dear Jacques! Each morning she awoke with the thought that today she would receive some message from him. Why hadn't she? Was he in prison somewhere? Ill? Or even . . .?

The driver pulled his ancient horse to a stop. "Here is the gate, mademoiselle."

Because she did not want to give her courage time to evaporate, she spent the rest of the day searching for employment, not in the finer shops, but in bakeries and taverns and even a fish monger's. She saw that the old cart driver had been right. In the districts that were poorer and thus less well-guarded, many establishments had been "looted out of business." And that meant even keener competition for employment in the places that were left.

Toward the end of the day she did find someone willing to hire her. He was a stout man who ran a bakeshop. "I will hate to let go the girl I have now, but I will do it. You will find that this is just the sort of place to work in weather like this. The ovens will keep you warm in the daytime, and at night I will keep you warm in my bed."

He was smiling, but his eyes had a cold take-it-or-leave-it shine. Hating him, she wished she could find some sufficiently scathing words, but by that time she was so tired and discouraged that she simply turned and walked out.

Over the next week she received several more offers of work, but in each case her prospective employer made it clear that she would have to share his bed. If it turned out that she would have to be a prostitute, she thought bitterly, she would join those patrolling the streets. She was not going to work twelve hours a day or more in a bakery or tavern, and in addition allow her employer to make a whore of her at night.

Finally, aware that her search for work was bringing her nothing but holes in her shoes and a sharper and more expensive appetite, she stayed in the attic room for several days, trying to read and to practice her penmanship, but much of the time staring dully at the window. She left the room only to fetch water from the courtyard well, or, when she had no food, to join the queues in front of the shops and spend a little more of her dwindling supply of money.

One morning a linnet flew past her windows, trilling notes which, in the country, had always told her spring was at hand. She realized that it must be almost April. Perhaps warm weather would bring brisker business and therefore more chances for employment. Inspired by the thought, she set out again to make the rounds of bakeries and taverns and fish shops, avoiding only those places where the proprietor had made it clear that he wanted a bed partner as well as an employee.

She found no work.

As she crossed the river around five she felt an impulse to linger on the bridge and try to lose herself for a few minutes in the beauty of the evening—the air almost balmy, the river shimmering with muted colors in the near-sunset light, and the Ile de la Cité like some gigantic ship bearing Notre Dame on its deck. But she knew that it would be wise to be up those rickety stairs and behind her locked door when darkness descended.

She went along the curving Left Bank streets to the tall old house, began to climb the already shadowy stairs. On the landing below her own she halted in astonishment.

The Ribeaux family's door stood wide open. Sunset light filtering through a smeared window showed her that the room beyond was bare except for a broken chair lying on the dirty floor. They must have moved, she realized, taking their furniture with them.

A sudden thought sent her racing up the last flight of stairs. On the landing she stopped in her tracks. Where the lower right-hand panel of the door had been there was an irregular opening, large enough to admit the youngest of the undersized Ribeaux children, and perhaps his older brothers as well. With numb fingers she turned the key in the lock that had proved so useless.

Undoubtedly because they were too large to carry away, they had left the bed and the table and the wardrobe and the food cupboard. But in the next few minutes she found that they had taken almost everything else—her lovely green dress and cloak from the wardrobe, the books from the shelves, the knives and wooden bowls and spoons and pewter plates and mugs from the cupboard. They had taken her small supply of tallow candles, and the box of charcoal from beside the

hearth, and all of her food except a hard crust of bread which she had intended to place on the windowsill for the birds.

And, of course, they had taken her money. The two guardsmen had not noticed that loose brick, but the ferret-eyed Ribeaux children had. She had known that as soon as she entered the room. Her eyes, flying to the fireplace, had seen the brick lying in two pieces on the hearth. Without hope she had knelt and explored the empty cavity with her hand.

Now, in the growing dark, she lit the candle standing on what had been the bookshelf. Why, she wondered numbly, had they left the candle stub and the box of flints? Perhaps because they had not considered them worth the trouble. Certainly they had taken the hourglass which had stood beside the flint box. She knew she ought to save the candle stub, but tonight of all nights she could not bear the thought of sitting here in the dark.

She went over to the bed, sat down on its edge, and stared dazedly straight ahead. She had no employment, no money, and no food.

She felt it then, one of the most primitive of all fears, the fear of starvation.

12

THE NEXT MORNING she walked a few hundred yards to a stone building on the banks of the Seine which housed the office of the district's police *commissaire*. A fat man in a too-tight uniform, the *commissaire* looked as if he had consumed an excessive amount of wine the night before, and this morning as a result hated himself and everyone else. Seated behind a table, he listened in scowling silence to her account of the robbery. Then he leaned forward, a look of relish in his bloodshot eyes.

"How much money do you say this Ribeaux family robbed you of?"

"Almost thirty-five francs."

"Thirty-five francs! Mademoiselle! Do you know how many bodies of murder victims we have pulled out of the Seine this past week? Five! All of them with their throats cut and their pockets turned inside out. One was a lawyer whose wife said that he had been wearing an emerald ring worth six thousand francs. And you come bothering me with your stolen wooden bowls and your thirty-five francs."

She said, chin lifted, "It was all I had."

"Even so, what do you expect me to do about it? If you yourself were able to write a list of what was stolen, I would place it on file. But you can scarcely expect me, busy as I am—"

"I will make out such a list."

With a look of sardonic unbelief he pushed an inkstand and quill pen and a piece of paper toward her. Standing bent over the table, she listed every item, from the money to the hourglass, and then pushed the paper toward him. He read it, obviously trying to hide his resentful surprise.

At last he said, "I do not think that writing this will do you any good, mademoiselle. By this afternoon they will have eaten your food, spent your money, and sold all these highly valuable household goods you have listed. You will never see them again."

Undoubtedly that was the case. But at least she had the satisfaction of seeing how taken aback he had been by her ability to write. She said good-bye and walked out into the weak spring sunshine.

She knew that she should go back to that tall old house, search in its courtyard for a board and some nails and some object with which to hammer them into place, and then mend her broken door. With nothing left to steal, she need not fear thieves any longer. But still there was the chance that some rapist or some lunatic might be able to squeeze through that broken panel.

As yet, though, she could not bring herself to go back there. She wandered over a bridge above the river, which, on this day of sun thinly veiled with clouds, had a blue-gray sheen. She'd had no breakfast that morning, and no supper the night before. Although she did not feel actual hunger

pangs as yet, she was aware that they could not be more than a day or so away.

What, she wondered, was she to do? Go back to that baker, the one who had made it brutally clear that she would be his doxy as well as his employee? She'd be damned if she would. Prowl the sidewalks, then, smiling at strange men? She thought of some of the street whores she had seen, women whose paint could not hide the marks of the diseases that ravaged them. She thought bitterly: No! She would not let the world do that to her.

What should she do, then? Throw herself into the Seine? Despite her fear, despite the hunger which made her feel light-headed, all her youthfulness and pride revolted at the thought that she might be driven to taking her own life.

She knew that now, dressed in her peasant skirt and blouse, she would have no chance of finding employment except in one of the poorer districts. But today she could not face the noise, the filthy gutters, the smells. She would keep to the rich districts, and just ignore whatever suspicious looking passing *agents de police* might give her. She moved past the long stone wall of the Louvre and then turned right onto the cobblestoned space that separated the Louvre from the Palace of the Tuileries. Through the open gate to the courtyard she saw lounging National Guardsmen, placed there ostensibly to protect Their Majesties, but in reality to guard against their trying to escape. Then she turned left onto a street of smart shops.

She paused before a jeweler's show window. In it was a little round trinket box made of gold or of some metal that resembled it. Affixed to the top was the figure of some fabulous long-tailed bird, its plumage made up of brilliant red and green and white stones. Whether they were real gems or merely paste she had no way of knowing. She only knew that the box was about the prettiest object she had ever seen.

On this fairly warm day the shop door stood open. Angélique heard a woman's voice, loud and arrogant and yet querulous. "Two thousand francs seems a lot to pay for a bracelet, even if the diamonds are real. The stones are certainly very small."

A man's voice answered in a deferential murmur. Angélique leaned closer to the window. On the customer's side of a long showcase stood a large woman, richly dressed in a yel-

low brocade gown and a black hat with yellow plumes. Behind the showcase stood a thin little man. Between them, resting on a blue velvet cushion, was a dully gleaming object, no doubt the bracelet in question.

"I will let you know," the customer said. "First I must consult my husband."

"Very well, madame." He lifted the showcase's glass top and placed the bracelet on its cushion inside.

"Armand!" Another female voice, a fretful one, calling from beyond the closed door at the far end of the shop.

The man said, "Please excuse me now, madame. My wife is not well. Good day, and please convey my respects to your husband."

The man went to the door at the end of the long room, opened it, closed it behind him. As the woman emerged from the shop's doorway, a footman descended from the high seat of a coach standing at the curb and opened the coach door for her. The vehicle moved away.

Transfixed, Angelique stil looked through the shop window. He had turned no key after he lowered the showcase's lid. In his haste to answer his wife's summons, he had left the case unlocked.

A bracelet worth two thousand francs! Suppose she could sell it for a fourth that much. Even if she did not find work, and even if Jacques did not return, she would have food for many months. For a long time she would not have to think about bedding down with that baker or joining the pitiful whores with their disease-marked faces.

The spot where he had stood when he put away the bracelet was just about midway of the case. Quick, she commanded herself. Don't stop to think about it. Go inside. Take the bracelet, and only the bracelet.

Every nerve taut, she left the hazy sunlight for the shop's dimness. She slipped behind the counter and lifted the showcase lid. Its hinges creaked. She froze. Then, fighting down her fear, she looked down into the case. For a moment she saw no bracelet. Should she take something else—that glittering necklace, for instance—even though she did not know whether it was worth the risk? Then she saw the bracelet. In his haste, the shopkeeper had slid the bracelet onto the showcase's felt-covered floor and then partially covered it with the

blue velvet cushion. She snatched up the bracelet, dropped it into her skirt's deep pocket, and started to lower the lid.

The door at the back of the shop opened.

Released by her nerveless fingers, the case's lid slammed shut. For a moment she and the little shopkeeper, both motionless, looked at each other. Then she turned and fled toward the door.

"Thief!" the little man screamed. "Stop! Stop, thief!"

She had almost reached the doorway when someone filled it. She had a confused impression of a big middle-aged man in brown velvet coat and breeches. He caught her arm and said, almost jovially, "Here, my girl! Not so fast."

By now the shopkeeper had caught her other arm. Leaning out into the street, he screamed, "Police! Police!"

13

THE NIGHTMARE HAD lasted more than twenty-four hours now. No, more than thirty. It had been well before noon yesterday when she had stood outside the jeweler's window, light-headed with hunger but at least free. Now, her right arm gripped by a jailer's dirty hand, she moved down a stone corridor lit by the reddish light, falling through a window set high in the wall, of the near-sunset world outside.

Yesterday, on that smart shopping street, not one but two *agents de police* had responded to the shopkeeper's cries. As soon as they appeared, the middle-aged citizen who had captured her moved hastily away. The police had held on to her while the shopkeeper, with a triumphant cry, retrieved his property from her skirt pocket. He went into his shop for a few moments, came out, locked the door, and accompanied the police and their prisoner to the office of the nearest *commissaire*, a thin man in this case, bored-looking and fortyish. He listened to the excited shopkeeper. He asked the terrified girl a few questions. Afterward Angelique could not remem-

ber exactly what the questions were, or what sort of answers she had stammered out, although she knew she had been too frightened to tell anything but the truth. Then, not even speaking, just jerking his head, the *commissaire* indicated that she was to be taken away.

One of the policemen had led her to a barred room behind the *commissaire's* office. Even though there were at least a half-dozen pallets scattered over the stone floor, she was the only prisoner. Too numb by then to feel anything much, she sat on the floor with her back against the wall—a wall upon which former prisoners had scratched names, initials, and drawings, some of them obscene—and stared through the bars out into the corridor.

A few hours later a limping youth of about sixteen with a not unfriendly grin brought her a bowl of some evil-smelling concoction which appeared to be gruel with a few pieces of what might have been fish floating in it. If it was fish, it had not been fresh for some time. Hungry as she was, she could not eat that. After a while the youth came back and took the bowl away.

Evidently there was a wall torch somewhere out in the corridor, because all night a dim, wavering glow came through the bars. Sure that all the pallets were verminous, she sat against the wall all night. Sometimes, with her head on her knees, she fell into fitful slumber. Even when she was awake, her thoughts were sluggish, almost as if she had been drugged. Vaguely she was aware that her mind was protecting itself against the full realization of what had happened to her.

In the morning the boy brought more gruel, and again she rejected it, although she drank the water he offered in a pewter cup. Time passed with a slowness she had not thought possible. She walked up and down every once in a while, but for the most part just sat, while the light from the barred window set high above her brightened toward noon, and then, after an unmeasured interval, began to grow dimmer.

At last an older guard appeared, let her out of the cell, and led her up a curving iron staircase to a large room. Remembering Simon's trial, she recognized it as a courtroom. The same benches for spectators, now empty. The same elevated platform with a white-wigged judge, an old man who looked half-asleep, sitting behind a long table. But in this

court there was more than one prisoner. A line of more than a half-dozen men stood before the judge. The guard who held Angelique's arm led her to one end of the line.

An officer of the court, a youngish man with spectacles, stood up from his table below the judge's bench and began to drone out a list of names and charges. Evidently the judge had a similar list on his desk, because she saw his gaze moving down a page of foolscap.

She heard her own name. "Angelique Dubois, theft of a bracelet valued at two thousand francs. Crime attested to by Armand Gillon, shopkeeper, and by *agents de police* Jean-Pierre Simone and David Delain."

After a while the clerk stopped reading. Then the judge, not even looking at the prisoners, began to read in a dry, almost whispering voice from the list on his desk. "Louis Gervais, pickpocket, one year in La Fabrique Prison. Jean-Louis Colbert, forger, two years in La Fabrique Prison. Angelique Dubois, thief, five years in La Fabrique Prison."

She stopped listening to anything except a strange, high-pitched ringing in her ears.

She and the other prisoners were led into a courtyard and herded though the rear entrance of a coachlike conveyance that held, not seats, but benches running along each side. Next to the entrance, a guard sat down at the end of each row.

The coach jerked forward. Wheels clattered over cobblestones. To keep from being thrown against the prisoner next to her—an old man talking to himself—she gripped the bench's edge with both hands. Across from her sat a boy—perhaps the pickpocket—even younger than herself, his dirty face streaked with tear marks. Next to the boy sat a burly man of about thirty-five with a missing left ear. He grinned and winked at Angelique.

Terror broke through her protective numbness. Were they going to shut her up with these men? Surely not, not even for the night, let alone for . . . abruptly her mind veered away. She could not think the words "five years." Why, five years was an inconceivable length of time, more than a fourth of the years she had spent on earth.

The coach clattered and swayed over a bridge. Even though the vehicle was windowless, Angelique had a sudden vision of what the river must look like at that hour, shimmer-

ing like shot silk under a sunset sky. Then the coach turned down a Left Bank quay and into a courtyard. Through the coach's exit door she could see part of a structure of gray stone. She recognized the building. Often on their Sunday walks she and Jacques had passed it. Almost two hundred years ago, Jacques had told her, the place actually had been a cloth factory. Now it was a prison—not for important prisoners, enemies of the state, but for common criminals.

The coach stopped. The prisoners filed out. A sense of relief broke through her numbness. At least the men were being herded toward the building's right wing. In the grasp of one of the uniformed guards who had ridden inside the coach, she was being led toward the high wooden doors of the left wing. One half of the door opened. Another man took her arm.

The heavy door slammed shut behind her. The sound intensified her sense of moving through a nightmare. She walked along the stone corridor on feet and legs that seemed to have no feeling. That odd ringing in her ears had grown louder. It muted and distorted a sound from up ahead, a babble of women's voices.

"Here we are," the guard said.

They had stopped before a big room. No, not a room, but a cage, about thirty feet long and twenty feet deep, with vertical bars along one entire side separating it from the corridor. The guard unlocked a gate in the bars with a heavy iron key. He gave her a little push. "In you go, my pretty." His voice, far from unkind, was even pleasant. The gate slammed behind her, and the key grated in the lock. Then his footsteps retreated down the stone corridor.

From every part of the big cage women moved toward her. They halted, forming a semicircle around her. For a few seconds no one spoke. Her dazed eyes took in their faces, some of them fairly young, one creased with age and framed in tangled gray hair, the others middle-aged. One of them, a brunette of about forty with a vacant smile, was swaying on her feet. Even though she stood almost a yard away, Angelique could smell the alcohol on the woman's breath. Later Angelique was to learn that through the guards a prisoner could obtain wine or about anything else she wanted, as long as she had the price.

The old woman reached out and touched Angelique's

cheek with cracked and dirty fingers. "What is your name, dear?"

They all began to babble then. Angelique's distended eyes swept the circles of faces. Pockmarks. Pustules. Missing teeth. Grins that seemed more threatening than friendly. And all of them pressing closer and closer to her. She pressed her back against the bars, as if hoping they would give way.

A red-haired young woman of about twenty-six, half a head taller than any of the others, appeared behind the gray-haired woman. "Let her alone, all of you. Can't you see she is scared out of her wits?"

The women dispersed. Angelique crossed to the far wall, vaguely aware as she did so of a straw-covered area at one end of the room. She was aware too of several three-legged stools standing here and there on the stone floor. It was only instinct that led her past them. She did not as yet know that the guards rented the stools to prisoners who had the price, and that any unauthorized person seeking to occupy one might end up with her face scratched and handfuls of hair torn out. As in that other cell across the river, Angelique sat down with her back to the wall and stared straight ahead. Evidently the red-haired young woman's words carried considerable weight, because even though Angelique was aware that the other prisoners, talking in low tones, kept glancing at her, none of them approached her.

After a while the red-haired woman came over and sat a few feet away from her. For perhaps a minute she remained silent. Then she said, "My name is Charlotte. What is yours?"

"Angelique. Angelique Dubois."

"Why were you put in here, and for how long?"

"I was sentenced to five years for theft." She added, with an effort, "I suppose you might really call it attempted theft, since I got no farther than the shop door."

"Five years! You must have tried to steal something pretty valuable."

"A bracelet worth two thousand francs."

There was respect in Charlotte's voice. "One thing you can say for yourself, even if you did get caught. You aimed high. Now, me, I am in here for stealing eighteen francs from a customer's pocket. But then, I was sentenced to only a year for it, and the year will be over soon."

Her manner left no doubt as to the sense in which the

robbed man had been her customer. But Angelique saw that the woman's rather plain face, unlike that of many whores, looked neither diseased nor vicious.

Charlotte said, "Is this the first time you have been in prison?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I have been in five times, starting when I was seventeen. Well, you have had bad luck, my young friend. But you will get through those five years."

Angelique looked at the straw where she would have to sleep. At the women with their frowzy hair, their faces that bore the marks of viciousness or disease or stunted intelligence or all three. She looked at the door in the wall which, she correctly guessed, led to a noisome privy.

She said in a toneless voice, "No, I will not get through five years in this place. I shall go insane. Either that or I will . . ." She broke off.

Charlotte studied her with shrewd hazel eyes. "Perhaps. The last time I was in here there was a girl who did that. After everyone was asleep she broke a wine bottle and slashed her wrists. In the morning we found she had bled to death in the straw. But somehow I don't think you will give up like that, in spite of the way you look.

"I mean," she went on, "if you had the right clothes you would look like one of those porcelain figurines of princesses you see in the Rue de St. Honoré shop windows. And yet I have the feeling that there is something awfully strong in you . . ."

She stopped speaking, and then added, "You will be able to stand it."

Angelique said, bleak horror in her voice, "No, I will not be able to stand it. This cell, the noise in here, day after day, month after month, for five years, with no chance to escape for even five minutes . . ."

A sudden thought arrested her words. Reading would allow her to escape—into other rooms, other times, even other continents—not just for five minutes, but for hours on end.

She said, "Oh, God! If only I had my books."

Charlotte stared at her. "Books? You own books?"

"My . . . lover did. But they were stolen."

"And you could read them?"

"Yes. Jacques, the man who owned the books, he taught me."

After several seconds Charlotte said, "I'll see to it that you get a book. Chico is coming to visit me tomorrow."

Angelique asked listlessly, "Chico?"

Charlotte's voice was matter-of-fact. "It is a nickname they gave him because he lived in Madrid for a while. Chico is my pimp. He always brings me money so that I can rent my stool—that is mine, the one over there in the corner—and buy a little wine once in a while. I'll ask him for an extra franc. Then you can give it to the guard. He ought to be able to buy a book for that, shouldn't he?"

"Less than that." On their walks along the quays, she and Jacques had seen dog-eared books, no doubt once the property of students at the university on the Left Bank, priced at only a few centimes.

"I guess that if you can read you can write too."

"Yes."

"Maybe a franc will be enough to pay for pen and ink and paper also."

Beneath her despair, her irrational sense that the other prisoners and even the walls of this room would soon move in to smother her, she felt a stir of hope. Perhaps she could stay not only alive but also sane.

"Now, you ought to know about the jailers," Charlotte went on. "Leon, the daytime one who brought you in here, is not so bad. Oh, he makes what he can off us women. Why else should he want to work in a prison? But he is good-natured enough. Jean Brissac, the night guard, is a bastard. Make any sort of disturbance while he is on duty, and he reports you to the warden, and you get nothing but water for two days.

"Now, about the warden. He is the one to watch for..."

She broke off. The sound of rolling wheels came down the stone corridor. The guard who had led Angelique to this cell appeared outside the bars, wheeling a cart upon which stood a large kettle and several stacks of wooden bowls. Numb with fear, Angelique had not even noticed before what he looked like. Now she saw that he was stout and fiftyish, with a stubble of gray beard and small gray eyes, sly but good-natured.

He opened a window set about five feet high in the gate. "Here is your supper, girls. Line up."

Angelique knew that probably the food would be no better than that which she had been unable to eat the night before and this morning. But she also knew that after more than sixty hours without food she would eat anything given to her.

She lined up with the others. Leon ladled the contents of the pot into the wooden bowls, each with its wooden spoon, and placed them on the little shelf inside the opening. When it was Angelique's turn, she saw that supper consisted of gruel with a few pieces of what looked like fatty pork floating in it. She ate every drop, and wished she had more. After about fifteen minutes Leon returned. He collected the bowls and spoons through the opening and counted them before he rolled the cart away.

The big room was almost dark now. Several women already had lain down on the straw at one end of the room. At the opposite end two middle-aged women had lit a candle and, seated on the stone floor, had begun a game of cards. Charlotte brought her stool over to where Angelique sat with her back against the wall.

Angelique nodded toward the card players. "Is that permitted?"

"Why not, if you have been able to afford the cards and the candle? But you must be quiet enough not to disturb Brisac. He is on duty now. He sits in a chair just inside the wooden gate where you came in, and he sleeps most of the time."

The two card players were being quiet, even though a quarrel had broken out between them. Faces rage-distorted in the candlelight, they exchanged whispers that made them sound like hissing geese.

"You can have my sleeping place if you like," Charlotte said, "over there in the corner next to the bars. The air is better there."

"But why should you give me—?"

"Give you! Nobody in here gives you something for nothing. Remember that. I want something in exchange."

"What?"

"When you get pen and paper, I want you to write a letter to my brother. He works on the docks in Marseilles. He can read and write a little, and you can read me his answer."

"I'll be more than glad to."

She went to her place in the corner over by the bars soon after that. The room was not quiet. She heard restless movements, snores, mutterings, the slap of cards, and now and then the players' low-voiced bickering. She thought: How can I ever sleep, and almost immediately fell into exhausted slumber.

A voice screaming, "Murder! Help me, help me!" dragged her back to consciousness. She sat bolt upright. Other voices were speaking now. "Shut up, Marthe." "Wake up, you old idiot."

Heavy footsteps. Strengthening glow of candlelight. A tall, heavy man, black-bearded, stood outside the bars. The light of the candle he held, striking upward, emphasized the black brows above his deep-set eyes, and gave him the look of a child's nightmare of an ogre. This, she knew, must be the night guard, Brissac.

"What is the row? Quiet in there, all of you."

"It is Marthe," someone called. "She had one of her nightmares."

By the candlelight, Angelique saw that the old woman was sitting up in the straw. Gradually the terror in her face was giving way to a dazed look.

"Well, if she starts another one, wake her up! If you don't, you will all get nothing but water tomorrow."

He turned away. The candlelight diminished. Angelique lay awake until the snores resumed, and the muttering of those beset by dreams. Then she went back to sleep.

The clatter of the wheeled cart, propelled by Leon, the day guard, awoke her. Breakfast, she found, was plain gruel accompanied by bread. Again she ate every bit, not allowing herself to wonder for very long if the wooden bowl and spoon had been washed since they were last used, probably by some other prisoner than herself. When she asked how long it would be until dinnertime, Charlotte said, "No dinner. Just breakfast and supper. Try not to move around too much. The last time I was in here, some of the women talked of getting together and asking Warden Budreau if we could take walks in the courtyard. I figured it would just make us hungrier. We took a vote, and most of the prisoners agreed with me."

Charlotte's Chico arrived in the late morning. From Leon's

genial manner as he ushered the visitor to a spot outside the bars, Angelique guessed that Chico had given him some coins. Charlotte moved to the bars and began a low-voiced conversation with her caller.

His appearance astonished Angelique. He was young and fair-haired, with blue eyes set wide in a face so handsome that it was almost beautiful. His fawn-colored coat and breeches were expertly cut, and his shoes were set with engraved silver buckles. She might have thought him a rich merchant's son, except that his low-voiced words were delivered in a working-class Parisian accent, interspersed with street argot she only partially understood.

At last Charlotte turned and beckoned to her. When Angelique went over to the bars, the older girl said, "This is the one, Chico. If you will give me an extra franc, Leon will buy her a book and perhaps some paper and ink and a pen."

Not answering, Chico let his smiling gaze travel from Angelique's face to her feet and back again.

Charlotte said, her good-humored voice only slightly tinged with jealousy, "No point in looking at her like that, Chico. She will be in here for the next five years. Besides, she would never suit you. She does not have the right temperament for the business."

"Well, too bad," he said cheerfully. He reached into his breeches pocket, brought out some coins, and placed them in Charlotte's outstretched hand. He kissed her, smiled at Angelique and walked away.

A few minutes later as they sat against the wall, Charlotte on the stool and Angelique on the floor beside her, Angelique said, "He looks very different from what I expected."

"You mean, he does not look like a pimp? He is, though, and a good one. Don't let those choirboy looks fool you. Once I saw him kill a man who had tried to cheat him. Chico killed him with one blow, striking the side of his hand against the man's Adam's apple. And another time Chico knifed one of his girls on the cheek from her forehead to her chin. Scarred her for life."

Angelique's stomach tightened into a knot. "And yet, after that you went on . . ."

"Being one of his girls? Sure. He had to knife that other one. She was about to leave him to go to work for another pimp. How could he stay in business if he allowed things like

that to happen? Besides, he is good to me. It is not his fault that I am in here. He told me to never rob a customer who was not dead drunk. And yet he has come to see me each week and given me a little money all the time I have been in here.

"And anyway," she finished flatly, "I love him."

Angelique looked at her, speechless.

"You find that hard to understand? Chico cares about me, or at least pretends to. Nobody else ever cared about me but my brother, and I have not seen him for almost five years."

"But surely your father, your mother . . ."

"My mother was an absinthe drinker. Maybe some days when I was very little she was sober, but if so, I don't remember it. My father raped me when I was ten, and a few months later disappeared, although I doubt that the two things had any connection. Not long after that my mother went away somewhere and never came back. A woman who lived on the floor below us took my brother and me in. I was ten then and he was eight. When he was nine she turned him over to a man who trained young boys as pickpockets. When I was thirteen she put me on the street. Now do you understand how I could love Chico?"

Angelique made no answer.

Many people, she realized, would say that she herself had had a rough, hardworking childhood. But she'd had love. Her inarticulate mother, now an unwelcome dependent in her brother's home, had loved her. Claude, dead in that wheat field, had loved her with all his childlike soul. And Simon, until his death on the gallows, had loved and protected her, even though he had known she was not his own child.

If not for Marie and Simon and Claude, she too might have felt impelled to give her devotion to any man, no matter of what sort, who gave her a little kindness. And if she survived five years in La Fabrique, perhaps it would be only because of the strength given her by the memory of Marie and Simon and Claude.

EARLY IN THE afternoon the guard Leon walked down the corridor. Angelique hurried to the bars and held out the franc Charlotte had passed on to her. "Will you please buy me a book with this? And a pen and ink and some paper too, if there is any of the franc left over."

"A book! What kind of a book?"

Angelique had thought about that. She needed a long, long book, one that would keep her absorbed, and perhaps even solaced, for weeks, months, years. "I would like a Bible."

"I will try. If I cannot get you a Bible, I will buy some other book."

He came back a little more than an hour later carrying a paper-wrapped parcel in one hand and a large volume in the other. "Here are your writing things," he said, thrusting the parcel through the bars. "That plus the book cost me the whole franc."

Obviously he lied. He had kept a few centimes for himself. But in her pleasure over his purchases she did not mind.

He handed her the book through the bars. "The bookseller did not have any Bibles, so I bought the biggest book he had. Not being a reader myself, I don't know what the name of it is or what it is about, but the bookseller said it was a real good one."

Looking at the book's badly worn cover, she saw that it was written by François Rabelais. The strange title she sounded out in her mind, syllable by syllable: *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

Jacques had once mentioned Rabelais. When she asked what Rabelais had written, Jacques smiled and said, "Nothing suitable for you to read, my darling."

She laid the package in the corner where she had slept the night before, and then, with the book in her hand, turned

around. She was surprised to see that most of the women in the room had crowded close to her. "Read to us from your book," one of them said. "Yes!" another one said. "We want to hear what is in your book."

Someone, not Charlotte, brought her a stool. The women, some sitting, some standing, formed a circle around her. She opened the heavy volume and began to read of the birth of that enormous child, Gargantua, during the course of a picnic devoted more to brandy than to food.

"No sooner born, he did not, like other babes cry: 'Whaw! Whaw!' but in full, loud voice bawled: 'Drink, drink, drink!' as though inviting the company to fall to. What is more, he shouted so lustily that he was heard throughout the region of Beuxes.' "

Very soon Angelique realized why Jacques considered Rabelais unsuitable for young women readers. But her fellow prisoners loved it. They exclaimed and laughed and nudged one another and demanded that she read some of the comic passages over again.

After a while Leon appeared and stood grinning outside the bars. No one seemed to mind that she read slowly and haltingly, and often had to say, "I do not know what the next word means," or, "I cannot pronounce it." For a time at least these women were no longer the scourings of the Paris street, penned up in a filthy prison. They wandered through sunlit fields and vineyards with Rabelais, listening to his bawdy jokes about lustful wives, young peasant lovers, and wine-bibbing husbands.

After about two hours, pleading that her voice was tired, she closed the book. Seated on Charlotte's stool—the other woman had taken hers back when the reading was over—Angelique wrote a letter to Charlotte's brother in Marseilles.

Again supper was gruel with meat scraps. After Leon had collected the wooden bowls, one of the women suggested that Angelique resume her reading. But the big cage was already in semidarkness, and the card players' candle had guttered out the night before, and no one had another one.

Soon after that, Angelique lay down in her corner. Tonight sleep came even less easily. But at least she was able to turn her thoughts from the bleak, interminable years ahead to memories of the past. Not the recent past—the months with Jacques or, before that, the tavern where her visit to the En-

glishman's room had brought her such pain and humiliation. Instead she thought of the long-ago years. The quiet contentment she had felt as a child when she helped her mother prepare the family supper. Sitting with Claude on the river-bank while clear, cool water washed over their feet. And, when she was very small, riding on Simon's back as he crawled around the Dubois hut on hands and knees, growling fiercely. Finally the memories blurred, and she slept, only to be awakened by Leon banging a pewter ladle against the bars to announce breakfast.

An hour later she had just opened Rabelais to read to the circle of women when Leon reappeared. With him was a man of about forty-five in black broadcloth coat and breeches. He had a light brown beard and hair of a darker brown, hanging lankly from his large bald spot almost to his shoulders.

Leon said, in a loud, official tone she had never heard him use before, "Angelique Dubois! Come forward!"

Charlotte, sitting on the floor near Angelique, said in an agitated whisper, "My God! The warden. I did not finish warning you . . . But listen! Whatever he says, whatever he promises, say no!"

Angelique got up, laid the book on the stool, and moved to the bars. Leon turned and walked away. The other man said in a soft, gentle voice, "I am Warden Budreau. Leon tells me that you can read. What a clever little head it must be to read a big book like that."

Her only answer was an uncertain smile. Why did she find herself disliking him so much? Perhaps it was because the gentle tone and words contrasted with the sensuality of the too-red lips framed in the light brown beard, and with a certain coldness in the hazel eyes. Whatever the reason, she felt more repelled by him than by that lecherous baker from whom she had sought work, or Granny Monet's grandson Marcel back there in St. Isidore, or the black-bearded night guard Brissac.

He said, "I hear, my child, that you tried to steal a valuable bracelet."

"That is true, Monsieur Budreau. I was hungry."

"I am sure you were. Besides, that was your first attempt at crime." He looked past her into the cage. "It seems unjust that you should spend your youth penned up like an animal. Perhaps I can do something about that."

She felt a leap of wild hope. "Monsieur! What do you—?"

"I mean that I may be able to get your sentence reduced to two years, perhaps less."

"How, monsieur? How?"

"I will tell you. My wife and I have quarters above this prison. How would you like to live there and do housework for my wife?" He shook a finger at her archly. "Now, do not be too quick to say yes. Down here you can be completely idle. Up there you would have to meet my wife's standards of housekeeping, and they are very high. But you would have your own room, and good food."

He paused, and then added, "Best of all, if your conduct pleased both my wife and myself, I would use my influence to see that you are released about two years from now. You will be what then? Still only about twenty-one?"

"Yes, monsieur." She gripped the iron bars with both hands. "I will work very hard," she said fervently. "I am a good worker. I . . ."

She broke off. "Whatever he promises," Charlotte had told her, "say no."

He said, "Then shall I have Leon bring you upstairs in about an hour?"

"Monsieur, you are so very kind! But may I think it over? It seems unfair that I should be singled out for such good fortune, when there are perhaps others here far more deserving of mercy."

It was the most feeble of excuses, and he recognized it as such. Plainly he knew that at least one of the other women must have talked about him. The smile left his too-red mouth and his eyes grew even colder. Then he said, his smile back in place, "Very well, my dear. Think about it. If you decide to accept my offer, tell Leon so when he brings supper." He walked away.

As she turned back into the cage, she was aware of many knowing eyes fastened upon her. Some of the prisoners looked disappointed, as if they would have felt a malicious pleasure in hearing her accept the warden's offer. Those more kindly inclined gave her relieved smiles. Angelique walked, not to the stool where she had left the book, but over to her sleeping corner. Promptly Charlotte walked over and sat beside her on the straw.

"So you refused him."

"Not exactly. I told him I wanted time to think."

"He knows that means refusal. I could see it in his face."

"But why did you say I should refuse him?" Angelique cried. She recalled her leap of joy at the thought of being free of this cell, and, much sooner than she had expected, free of this prison. "He said he would see to it that I was released in only about—"

"He will not. He cannot. He does not have that kind of influence. All he will give you," Charlotte said brutally, "is a big belly and maybe a dose of the clap."

After a moment Angelique asked wretchedly, "How do you know that?"

"Because the first time I was in here I believed him when he said he could get my one-year sentence cut in half. I went to work in his quarters for him and his wife. Oh, the work was hard, but I did not mind that. I had good food, just as he had promised, and my own room. The trouble was Warden Budreau was in it a good many nights. You may wonder why a whore like me minded that."

She paused, but when Angelique said nothing, Charlotte went on, "Budreau is one of these slimy fellows who like to hurt girls. Slips a gag into your mouth and then goes to work with a little whip he has. Oh, he never whips a girl so hard that she might become desperate enough to try to get word to the outside about him. And he never whips on the face or arms where it would show. All the same, I hate men like that."

"And I am afraid of them," she went on after a moment. "As I said, Budreau tries to restrain himself, but such men can lose control. I once knew a girl who used to accommodate customers like him because she could charge them more. Well, one morning her neighbors found her dead in her room, with her hands tied behind her back. She had been strangled. Her throat was black with bruises."

Angelique shuddered. For a moment they were both silent. Then Angelique asked, "How did it turn out, you and Budreau?"

"Oh, after a while he decided he'd had enough of me. He accused me of stealing a silver spoon, but said that if I would just come back down here and quietly serve the rest of my sentence, he would not charge me with stealing the spoon. The day after I came back here, another girl went up to do housework in the Budreau quarters. She was still up there

when I finished my sentence, but that was seven years ago. I heard that the girl he has now was born in Martinique."

Horried, and yet still bitterly disappointed over the loss of that wild brief hope of having those interminable five years cut to two, Angelique said, "But I still wonder why you or some other girl has not reported him to higher authorities."

"Who would take the word of a prisoner against that of a warden? And anyway, who cares about women like us? By complaining, all a prisoner would ensure is that she would have an even rougher time for the rest of her sentence."

After a long silence Angelique asked, "What does his wife think of all this?"

"Who knows? Maybe she just doesn't care. Or maybe she is glad he gets prisoners to do the housework. That way she not only gets a free servant. Her husband does not come bothering her at night."

"What does she look like?"

"Dark. Middle forties by now, I guess. Rather good-looking. She paints a lot."

"Paints?"

"Pictures. Saints and madonnas and so on. She is very religious. Goes to mass every morning."

"Do they have children?"

"No, although she has a grown son by her first marriage. Now, come on, Angelique. Life is not too terrible in here once you learn to live it one day at a time. Come on back and read to us."

15

ANGELIQUE KNEW THAT in the world outside, spring had given way to summer. The leaves of trees along the boulevards, small and lettuce-pale when she last saw them, would have deepened to a dark green. Rich matrons shopping along the Rue de St. Honoré would be wearing, not wool or heavy

brocade, but summer silks and muslins. And in the evenings lovers would be embracing in the shadows along the Seine.

But in this place of stone floors and iron bars and light filtering through high, dirty-paned windows, all that summer meant was a slight difference in temperature. "One thing you can say for this place," Charlotte laughed. "It is about the coolest spot in Paris in summer. It is the winters that are bad."

Angelique, of course, had not experienced winter in the place, but she had heard stories about how the women shivered in the straw despite the dirty blankets that were supplied in the coldest months. She had heard how some of the women pooled whatever money they had to rent braziers from Leon and to buy charcoal to fill them. The braziers did raise the temperature, especially for those who huddled near them, but the charcoal fumes, added to the already fetid air, threatened all of them with suffocation. Whenever she began to contemplate the winter ahead, Angelique turned her thoughts in some other direction.

One morning in late July Charlotte was released. While Leon, with Chico beside him, waited to unlock the gate, she embraced each of the women. Angelique was the last one she turned to. For a moment, as Charlotte held her shoulders, Angelique expected to hear some final advice, some final exhortation not to despair. Then sadness came into Charlotte's eyes, as if she realized that there were no words which could bring real comfort to a young and sensitive girl shut up in this place. She kissed Angelique's forehead, then went through the gate, and, on Chico's arm, disappeared down the corridor.

Angelique missed Charlotte, missed her terribly. But at least she still had the distraction of reading aloud, until her voice gave out, each morning and afternoon. When she had finished Rabelais, she gave it to Leon to trade for another book. He brought back a volume which, he pointed out, was just as big as the first one. It was a French translation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Some of the women complained that the new book was not "lively" enough. Most of them became absorbed in the story, though. And two of the women—a dealer in stolen goods and a woman who, to get even with her employer, a sausage maker, had put ground

glass in the product—liked the book because it had “such a fine moral.”

She also continued to write letters for fellow inmates. At first she refused the few centimes she was offered for her services. Then she began to accept. Money could buy her a few things to make life in this place less vile. For instance, on a bench in a tiny anteroom to the privy there was a bar of soap lying beside the washbasin and pitcher. Chained to the wall was a communal comb. With the centimes she earned, Angelique was able to buy, through Leon, her own comb and her own bar of soap.

She wrote no letters of her own. The last thing she would want her mother or her other relatives or the people of St. Isidore to know was that she had been sent to prison.

Warden Budreau appeared several times each week, walking at a dignified pace past the bars and looking gravely in at the caged women. But, as Charlotte had predicted, he did not again summon Angelique to him. “He is too vain,” Charlotte had said. “He won’t risk another refusal.”

As the weeks crawled by, Angelique found that in spite of her reading and letter-writing she had become no more reconciled to prison life. Quite the contrary. It was as if each day, each hour, spent in this place added a bit to the load that was slowly crushing her sanity. Her sleep became more and more fitful, broken by increasingly vivid dreams. All the dreams were of escape, or of escape and recapture. One night she dreamed that she was somehow free and hurrying along the poplar-bordered road between St. Isidore and the Dubois hut. She was pleased at the thought of helping her mother make a good supper out of the hare Simon had poached that morning. She also was pleased that Jacques was to join her and her parents and Claude for the evening meal.

Then the mood of the dream changed. The sky darkened. A wind sprang up. Then from behind a tree stepped the gigantic figure of Brissac, the night guard, with a hangman’s black hood in one hand and a rope in the other. “You are going back,” he said.

Then the hood was over her head and the rope was being wound around her body. As he dragged her back the way she had come, she screamed and screamed and screamed, until she woke herself up and saw the real Brissac, standing with

candle in hand outside the bars and roaring that she must be quiet.

Berthe Galliard joined the women in the cage two days later.

When Leon led the new prisoner to the gate, Angelique was reading aloud from Aesop's *Fables*, a book for which Leon had traded *Pilgrim's Progress* the day before. The woman he admitted to the cage was a giantess over six feet tall, with a large head covered with spiky gray-black hair. Her tattered clothing looked stiff with dirt, and the creases of her forehead and cheeks were black lines of grime. Standards of cleanliness were not high among the inmates. But Angelique sensed that whereas the others were dirty out of sloth or indifference, this woman flouted dirt as a symbol of her contempt for any standards whatsoever.

She grinned, showing a few yellow teeth separated by gaps. "What is this?" she asked. "Lesson time? *Merde!* I thought they had sent me to prison, not school."

Someone called out in a constrained voice, "Hello, Berthe."

She did not answer. Striding over to the group of women, she looked down at Angelique. "What is your name?"

"Angelique Dubois."

"Mine is Berthe Galliard. How old are you?"

"I was nineteen last June."

"Nineteen! You don't look seventeen." She threw back her head and laughed. "Next they'll be jailing kids in diapers."

Someone asked, "How long are you in for this time, Berthe?"

"Eight years. I threw lye in a woman's face. Blinded her. But then, she wouldn't want to look at herself in the mirror anyway. She isn't so pretty now."

Angelique's stomach curled into a sick knot.

"I don't regret it," Berthe went on. "The bitch deserved it. And prison is not so bad, especially these days. Life is pretty rough out there, girls. No work, if you're fool enough to want to work. Ten thieves for every pocket worth picking, and five whores for every customer. In here you at least get food and a place to sleep. Right?"

She picked up a stool, placed it against the wall, and sat down, long legs stretched out in front of her. "Whew! Damned judge kept us standing half an hour before he came in to sentence us. Don't know what he was doing all that

time." She laughed, and then hazarded a guess about what he had been doing.

The woman whose stool Berthe had commandeered did not protest. Obviously she was afraid to. In fact, it soon became apparent that they were all afraid of Berthe. They were fascinated by her, though. She kept up a steady stream of talk, most of it obscene, and much of it concerned with crimes, sickeningly brutal crimes, which she or others had committed. And they all listened, including Angelique. Hearing that raucous, untiring voice, seeing the odd glitter in the woman's dark eyes, Angelique thought, "She is insane. She ought to be in a madhouse, not in prison."

Others, too, seemed to find Berthe's presence a disturbing element. The women bickered more than usual. Near supper-time a screaming, hair-pulling, shin-kicking fight broke out between two women, and Leon had to come in and separate them.

It took the women longer than usual, too, to settle down to sleep, perhaps partly because of the newcomer, and partly because a bluish radiance penetrating the corridor's high window indicated that there was a full moon outside. Before this, Angelique had noticed that even in this place shut away almost entirely from the rest of the world, the full moon had a disturbing effect. In her corner next to the bars Angelique looked up at the window's silver-blue rectangle for a long time, picturing the moon-flooded fields near the Dubois family hut. Then she slept.

Foul breath in her nostrils. A mouth fastening on her mouth. Someone's bent leg pinning her legs. Someone's hand exploring her body. She wrenched her mouth free, looked up into the moonlit face framed by spiky hair, and let out a strangled scream. Berthe caught her face in a cruel grasp, fingers and thumb biting into her cheeks. "Shut up, you little idiot."

Somehow Angelique managed to raise her arm and strike at that face looming over her. Berthe's hand lost its grip for a moment. Angelique filled her lungs and let out scream after scream.

Heavy, running footsteps, strengthening glow of a candle. Then Brissac stood outside the bars, black-bearded face furious. He roared, "What is all this row?"

Berthe was standing up now, grinning her gap-toothed grin,

and with her hands on her hips. From where she sat in the straw, Angelique pointed a trembling finger at the huge woman. "That . . . that vile creature . . ."

Brissac laughed. "I get it. But you will get used to Berthe. Now, shut up. And Berthe, leave her alone for tonight. If you don't, if there is any more noise, I am going to put the lot of you on plain water for two days. They will make you pay for those two days, Berthe. Not even you can fight the lot of them.

"Now, go on, Berthe. That's right, clear to the other side of the room."

He went back to his chair. There was silence for perhaps two minutes. Then a voice called softly, "Angelique."

Lying rigid, Angelique did not answer.

"I know you can hear me, Angelique. We are going to have a long time together, you and I. They tell me you've still got about four and a half years in here. And I'll be with you every minute of it."

Angelique thought: Oh, no you won't.

There was a way out of here for her. Far from a desirable way, or even a safe way, but still a way. She could accept Warden Budreau's offer, and trust to it that once she was up there with the warden and his wife, she would find some way of keeping him—and his "little whip"—out of her room. Why, once she was out of this cage, she might find a way to escape from the prison entirely.

And anyway, anything was better than staying penned up with that loathsome lunatic.

Afraid to go to sleep, she sat with her back to the wall until the blue-white of moonlight beyond the window turned to dawn gray. Soon the wheels of the food cart sounded along the corridor. Angelique stood and grasped the bars.

"Leon, please tell Monsieur Budreau that I would like to see him. Tell him that I . . . I would like to do housework for him and for Madame Budreau."

SHORTLY BEFORE NOON, flanked by Warden Budreau and by Leon, she walked along the corridor toward the high wooden doors. A few yards short of them the men stopped at a barred gate recessed in the corridor's stone wall. A slovenly guard stood beside it. The day of her arrival in this place, she had been too numb with humiliation and terror even to notice either the guard or the gate.

The guard turned a long key in the lock, swung the gate open. Beyond it an iron staircase spiraled upward through a dimly lighted stairwell. With Monsieur Budreau in the lead and Leon following, she climbed the stair. At its top the warden unlocked a plain wooden door.

"You can go back now, Leon," the warden said. Even though his manner ever since he had come down to take Angelique away had been dignified and aloof, now he could not keep excitement from thickening his voice.

Face expressionless, Leon nodded and then turned and clattered down the stairs. "In here, Angelique," the warden said. Mouth dry, nerves taut, she stepped past him into a clear, bare-floored hall wide enough so that they could walk side by side. They passed several closed doors and then an open one. Turning her head, she saw that the room beyond was a kitchen. A brown-skinned, handsome girl of about twenty-five straightened up from beside the fireplace to give Angelique a look of pure hatred. This must be the Martinique girl Charlotte had mentioned. Angelique felt a stab of guilt. Because of her, the Martinique girl would be returned to the barred room below. And obviously she preferred to remain up here, in spite of Budreau and his little whip.

While Angelique was still shrinking inwardly from the mental picture her thought had conjured up, Budreau opened a door at the end of the hall and gestured her inside.

The room's two windows were barred. Otherwise this was just a pleasant sitting room with a floral rug, green-and-white-striped wallpaper, and comfortable-looking chairs and sofas covered with green brocade. In the sunny windows, hanging plants compensated for some of the ugliness of those iron bars. Paintings of the martyrs—St. Stephen bloodied by the stone-throwers, St. Sebastian praying calmly despite the arrow piercing his flesh, St. Jeanne d'Arc amid the flames—hung on the walls.

On opposite sides of a table in front of the unlit fireplace sat a middle-aged, dark-haired woman and a young man, with what looked like account books spread out between them. The woman turned her face toward the doorway, and Angelique saw that she was handsome, with well-cut features and large dark eyes which, although intelligent, held some of the fanatical shine she had seen in the eyes of a former priest at St. Isidore. As for the young man, also dark-haired, there was no word for him but huge. Even sitting down, he appeared to be about six and a half feet tall. His shoulders must have measured a yard, and his hand looked far too big to wield the goose-quill pen he held.

"My dear," the warden said, "here is your new house servant. Angelique, this is Madame Budreau, and my stepson, Monsieur Artois."

Madame Budreau, irony in her dark eyes, inclined her head. The huge young man also nodded.

The warden pulled a thick watch from his waistcoat pocket. "And now, my dear, I will leave you to instruct your new maid. I have an appointment at the Hôtel de Ville with the subprefect of police."

He went out, closing the door behind him. Angelique stood silent, feeling her face grow hot with humiliation under the woman's searching, ironic gaze. At last she turned to her son. "Bertrand, please leave us now. Unless you are otherwise busy, come back tonight. We can work on the household accounts then."

Without speaking, the young man stood up, went to his mother, and bent to kiss her cheek tenderly. He nodded again to Angelique and then left the room.

Madame Budreau said into the silence, "My son is mute, as a result of an illness he suffered in childhood. It is hard to understand why God should have willed it thus, because Ber-

trand has a fine mind, and would have made a splendid son of the Church. But his muteness, of course, made it impossible for him to enter the priesthood."

Because she knew that she was expected to say something, Angelique asked, "Does your son live here, madame?"

"No, he has a room near one of the Right Bank quays. He often gets work unloading river barges."

Angelique could imagine the gigantic man lifting a hogs-head all by himself.

"Come closer," Madame Budreau said. "Now move a little to the left, so that you are in full sunlight."

Trying to appear calm, the girl stood there in the bright glare coming through the windows. At last Madame Budreau said, "You have never been a prostitute, have you?"

"No, madame."

"But you are a thief."

Angelique said wryly, "A most unskillful one, madame. The first time I stole something, I was caught immediately."

"Why did you turn thief?"

"Because I was hungry, madame."

"Still, you realized that stealing was not only a crime but a sin, did you not?"

Angelique wanted to say, "What should I have done, then? Sold my body on the streets or thrown myself into the river? Would not either of those two have been a sin?"

Instead she said, "Yes, madame. I know that stealing is a sin."

With that point settled, Madame Budreau seemed to relax slightly. She said, "You are not at all like the other prisoners my husband has chosen for . . . domestic duties." Irony weighted the last two words.

Angelique said nothing.

"Who are your parents?"

"They were peasants, madame. Only my mother is alive, and she is . . . not right in the head. The death of my brother and father came very close together, and it was too much for her. She now lives with my uncle. There was no room for me in his house, so I came to Paris to look for work."

Angelique expected to be questioned closely about her life since she had come to Paris. But Madame Budreau seemed to be thinking still about what Angelique had said of her

origins. "You say you are of peasant stock," the woman said, "and yet your appearance . . ." She broke off for a moment, and then continued, "I realize, my child, that this may strike you as an unfair and unkind question. Nevertheless, I am going to ask it. Are you sure you are of legitimate birth?"

Again Angelique felt color in her face. "I am not of legitimate birth. My mother told me so. The man I called father knew I was not his child, but it is hard to imagine that any parent could have been kinder."

The woman's face showed no expression. "And your real father?"

"I have no idea who he was. My mother told me only that he was . . . a gentleman."

As she spoke the word "gentleman," she found herself thinking, not of the shadowy unknown who had fathered her, but of Richard Lansing. It was because of that fine English gentleman that she was no longer in the country with her family but here in this room with barred windows, subjected to the questioning of this woman who knew she had been brought up here to serve as her sadistic husband's doxy.

Madame Budreau asked, "Why did you choose to come up here as a house servant?" Again the last words of her sentence were heavy with irony.

"I . . . I had to. A new prisoner was admitted yesterday, a woman named Berthe—"

"I know about that."

"You know, madame?"

"Yes. I go to mass every morning. The guards always report to me then about what has been going on in the prison. But what I meant was, had you any other reason for coming up here? Did you come because you hoped to be better fed, or because—"

"Oh, no, madame!" Angelique was unable to keep the indignation out of her voice. "Weeks ago your husband . . . spoke to me about coming up here. I did not consent. It was not until last night—"

"I thought that was the case. But I had to make sure that you did not come up here to try to avoid full punishment for your crime."

Again she studied Angelique, and then said, "I have wasted no concern on other prisoners my husband has brought up here. They were steeped and hardened in sin, all of them. But

you are different. You should not be subjected to my husband's attentions.

"And," she concluded, "you will not be."

Angelique said, after a stricken moment, "You are going to send me back down—"

"Of course I am not going to send you back down there! You will stay here. But you will be under my protection. When my son returns tonight, he will move the maid's bed into my room. If ever my husband bothers you, you are to let me know immediately."

Incoherent with relief and gratitude, Angelique said, "But how can you . . . ? What will Monsieur . . . ?"

"Monsieur will accept the situation. He has to. For one thing, my father, who operates a lace factory near Chartres, sends my husband a sizable sum each month to help with household expenses. My husband would not like to be deprived of the luxuries that money buys. But more important, there is my son. My husband is afraid of Bertrand, as well he might be, since he knows my son's opinion of him. Don't worry, my dear. Things will be as I say."

"Will . . . will the other prisoner remain here too, the one from Martinique?"

"Solange? I imagine Solange has already rejoined the other prisoners. Prison regulations, you see, allow my husband the domestic services of only one prisoner at a time. But waste no concern on Solange. She can hold her own with someone like that Berthe or anyone else. It is said that in Martinique, where she was a prostitute from the age of twelve onward, she almost certainly killed at least two men, although she was never brought to trial."

After a moment she added, "If by any chance you are wondering what my husband will do for diversion with both Solange and yourself unavailable to him, the answer is that he will have to go to the whores. There are some willing to oblige men like him."

She paused and then said, "Well?"

Angelique felt tears of relief stinging her eyes. "Madame, if I could find the words to thank you . . ."

"There is no need to thank me. You committed a crime, yes, and you are being punished for it. But it is my Christian duty to protect someone like you from being forced into other forms of depravity. Of course this does not mean that

you will not work very hard. I shall expect you not only to cook but also to keep these rooms spotless."

Angelique's voice was fervent. "Madame, after months of idleness in that place, hard work will be sheer joy."

A short silence settled down. How was it, Angelique wondered, that a handsome woman from an evidently prosperous background had married a man like the warden? And why did she stay with him?

Finally Madame Budreau said, "Your first duty will be to complete whatever dinner preparations Solange began. You may bring me a tray in here. After you have tidied the kitchen, we will discuss supper. I do not imagine Monsieur Budreau will be here to share it. He likes to take supper with superior officials as often as possible. As for this evening . . . Is it correct that you can read and write and do simple arithmetic?"

The warden's wife was indeed well-informed. "Yes, madame."

"Then this evening, while my son is transferring the bed from the maid's room into mine, you can help me with these household accounts. Incidentally, I shall tell my husband that I want you to sleep in my room because of my frequent asthma attacks."

"But will he believe . . .?"

"That I have asthma attacks? Of course he will believe it, because I do. Do you think I would tell a lie? When I have an attack, it would be good to have someone to prop pillows behind me and pour out my medicine." For the first time since Angelique had entered this room, a faint smile touched Madame Budreau's lips. It was an ironic smile, but still a smile. "Of course, he will suspect that I have other reasons also for making such an arrangement. Now, go finish the dinner preparations. Tonight it is to be roasted ortolans. Be sure to keep turning the spit so that the birds are cooked evenly on all sides."

When Monsieur Budreau returned around nine that evening, his wife and Angelique were seated in front of the fireplace, account books spread out on the table between them. Evidently he immediately sensed something unfavorable to himself in the atmosphere, because his bearded face, in the

light from the blazing candelabrum on the mantelpiece, looked alarmed as well as surprised.

"My dear lady! I intended to supply you with a housemaid, not a clerk. Until now your son has always—" He broke off as a sound of hammering came from somewhere down the hall. "What is that?"

"Bertrand. He has taken the bed out of the maid's room and is setting it up in mine. I want Angelique there so that she can help me whenever I have an asthma attack."

The warden stared at his calm-voiced wife. Furious color dyed his face, and then ebbed, leaving his skin and even that red mouth of his pale. Madame Budreau said in that same calm voice, "Is such an arrangement agreeable to you?"

His gaze, brilliant with hatred, went from his wife's face to Angelique's and then back again. He said thickly, "Of course, my dear. Domestic arrangements are strictly your responsibility." His voice began to shake. "And now, if you will excuse me, I am very tired, and will go to my own room."

17

MADAME BUDREAU HAD spoken truly when she said that Angelique would have to work hard. From the time she arose from her narrow bed in Madame Budreau's room until the time she returned to it, she cooked, swept, scrubbed, polished. On the rare occasions when she ran out of tasks, her mistress, whose eyesight tired easily, asked her to read aloud from the works of St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. What was more, quite often she was awakened in the night by Madame Budreau's voice, wheezing out a request for her medicine.

Still, Angelique considered herself infinitely better off than she had been in that loathsome cage below. She was clean now, and adequately fed. She even had some plain but serviceable new clothes, two blouses and skirts of dark gray cotton. Except for the bars at all the windows, and for the fact

that the door leading to the spiral iron staircase was kept locked, she might not have been conscious much of the time that she was still a prison inmate.

But one thing weighed upon her spirit most of her waking hours—an awareness of Monsieur Budreau's hostility. Often, feeling his gaze upon her, she looked at him in time to see that quickly veiled hatred in his eyes. She could understand it. He had deprived himself of Solange in order to install a new girl here, only to find that she was denied to him. And he dared do nothing about it, because she was protected not only by Madame Budreau but also by the woman's hulking and completely devoted son.

Once, while Angelique and Madame Budreau were placing lavender between the newly laundered sheets in the hall linen press, the warden's wife spoke of Bertrand's father. "My first husband was an attorney who handled our family's legal matters. He died when Bertrand was twelve."

Angelique murmured sympathetically. But why, she was thinking, did you marry a man like Budreau? Surely the woman's father would have been willing to support her and his grandson.

Madame Budreau went on, almost as if she had read the girl's thoughts, "I had no idea what my second husband was like until after I married him. When I met him in Chartres—he was visiting relatives there—he seemed to be a well-mannered and completely normal man. By the time I found out what he was, it was too late."

Angelique ventured, "Couldn't you leave him and go back to Chartres? I realize your father must be elderly, but surely you have other relations there."

The woman replied sternly, "I do. But marriage is a sacrament. My confessor long ago told me that I need not submit to my husband's peculiar tastes. Nevertheless, I am his wife, and shall remain with him as long as we both live."

As summer gave way to fall, Monsieur Budreau spent less and less time at home. Perhaps, in his wife's phrase, he was finding diversion with women who catered to men of his inclination. Whatever the reason for his absences, Angelique welcomed them.

On an afternoon in late October she was alone in the apartment. Madame Budreau had gone across the river to the dress shops on one of her rare shopping trips. Around four

o'clock, as Angelique knelt before the sitting-room fireplace, cleaning out the grate, she heard a key turn in the lock of that door at the top of the iron staircase. Then Budreau's footsteps sounded along the hall. Her nerves grew taut. He knew she would be alone. Yesterday she had overheard his wife tell him that she intended to shop this afternoon.

She stood up, the brush in her hand, as he stopped in the room's doorway. She felt relief. The look of menace she had feared to see in his face was not there, only the baffled hatred. He said, "Where is your mistress?" A faint slurring of his words made her think he was at least a little drunk.

"She has gone shopping, monsieur. I believe she mentioned to you yesterday that she intended to."

"Oh, yes. I forgot. Well, tell her that I will not be home for supper." He turned and walked away. She heard the door at the end of the hall open and close.

About ten minutes later, carrying a coal scuttle filled with ashes, she walked back to the kitchen. She emptied the ashes into a large tin receptacle kept there for that purpose, and then, carrying the empty scuttle, returned to the hall. A creaking sound made her turn her head.

Budreau indeed must have been drunk. He had not only failed to lock that always-locked door. He had not even closed it properly. Now a draft, eddying up those spiral iron stairs, was making the door move on its hinges.

Heart beating fast, she set down the scuttle, hurried to the door, and opened it wide. She knew that this sense of imminent freedom she felt was illusory. Just beyond the foot of the stairs was another door, with a guard standing on the other side of it. A second guard, Leon, stood at the tall double doors that led to the courtyard. And two more guards stood at the courtyard's entrance. Nevertheless, she went out onto the iron landing and looked down through the shadowy stairwell, illuminated only by the fading afternoon light that filtered through one narrow window set high in the curving wall. How delightful it would be to descend those stairs, pretending that each step led her to freedom, even though afterward she would just have to climb back up again.

Very quietly, lest the guard beyond the door hear her, she moved three steps down the curving iron stairs. Four steps. Five.

And then, without warning, death was almost upon her.

Somehow her feet had slipped out from under her. Somehow her grip had torn loose from the rail. She was on her back, bumping over the steps, sliding helplessly toward that curve in the iron staircase and the empty air beyond. Sliding toward a long, deadly plunge through near-darkness to the stone floor forty feet below.

With a strength born of mortal terror she managed to turn onto her side, grip a step's edge with her fingers, check her descent. Even so, her legs already jutted out over the curve in the stairs. And her fingers could not sustain their tenuous grip. Bathed in cold sweat, she forced herself to let go of the stair tread and make a wild grab for a stanchion that supported the rail. She caught it. For a moment, heart hammering in her chest, she remained motionless. Then she drew herself to safety. Cold and limp, she lay crumpled on the stairs.

Moments passed before a thought knifed through her numbed consciousness.

It had not been an accident. It had been a trap. He had left the door temptingly ajar. After that he had waited down there somewhere in the stairwell. Waited to see her plunge, silent or screaming, to her death. After that, doubtless, he had planned to call the guard. In the ensuing confusion, he would have been able to climb the stairs through the near-darkness and wipe up whatever substance it was which had caused her to slip.

Then another realization struck her. Even though his trap had failed, he must be still down there somewhere in the dimness. She could actually feel his presence.

Forcing her terror-weakened limbs to obey her, she stood up. As she climbed, she held tightly to the rail. Yes, there it was, on one step and on the two steps above it, a greasy substance that gleamed faintly in the dimness and seemed slippery underfoot even now, when she was treading carefully. Almost nauseous with the fear that she might hear him running up the stairs after her, she quickened her pace, opened the apartment door, closed it behind her. No way of keeping him out of the apartment. There was no bar on the inside of the door. She closed it. She sped to the room she shared with Madame Budreau, slammed the door shut behind her, turned the key in the lock.

She sank down onto the edge of her narrow bed. Although she strained her ears, she heard no sound whatsoever. After a

while her heartbeats slowed. He must have left the prison. But first, surely, he must have wiped up that incriminating grease from the stairs.

But what if he had not? What if Madame Budreau, coming up the stairs, should slip and . . .? Stern, ironic Madame Budreau, who nevertheless had provided protection when Angelique was at her most desperate and helpless.

She got up, unlocked the bedroom door, and, on tiptoes, moved to that door above the iron staircase. She opened it. The landing beyond was almost totally dark now. Heart thudding, she forced herself to descend a few steps. Then, clinging to the rail, she bent and felt of the next step. No grease. And no grease on the several steps below that. Turning, she sped back to the bedroom and locked the door.

By the time she heard footsteps in the hall, the room had grown so dark that she had lit the candelabrum on the dressing table. Surely those quick assured footsteps were Madame Budreau's. Just the same, she did not rise from the bed until Madame Budreau turned the knob, rapped sharply, and called, "Angelique! Why have you locked this door?"

The girl turned the key, opened the door. Madame Budreau swept past her and then turned around. "What is all this? I find our outer door unlocked, and this one locked, and no supper started. What has happened here?"

Angelique told her.

Before the girl had said more than a few words, Madame Budreau sank down onto the dressing-table chair, her face pale.

At last she said, "I thought he was too afraid of Bertrand and of me to harm you in any way. But apparently he has turned at least a little . . . mad.

"But cunning mad," she added after a moment. "Even if his superiors had bothered to investigate your death, he could have said that it must have been Bertrand or I who carelessly had left the door unlocked. As for your fall, he could have pointed out quite correctly that those spiral stairs can be dangerous for anyone, let alone a girl fleeing down them through near-darkness."

She stood up. Moving toward one corner of the room, where above a prie-dieu a votive light flickered before an image of the Virgin in her little wall shrine, Madame

Budreau said, "Wait for me in the sitting room. I wish to pray."

When the woman came into the sitting room about fifteen minutes later, her face looked purposeful and calm. She sat down beside the fireplace and waved Angelique to the chair opposite.

"I am going to commit a sin so as to prevent my husband being tempted again to commit an even greater sin. I am going to help you to escape."

Angelique was too overwhelmed to say anything at all.

"If you leave Paris immediately," Madame Budreau said, "you will not be tracked down. The times are far too tumultuous for the authorities to spend time scouring the provinces in search of a young woman thief."

Angelique found her voice. "But how will you manage . . . ?"

"To effect your escape? I will get to that later. Now, I know that there is an inn outside one of the city's eastern gates where a stage leaves each morning to carry passengers to Dijon and beyond. Your village of St. Isidore is between here and Dijon, is it not?"

"Yes, but how—?"

"You have told me that your uncle's house is overcrowded. Just the same, he will have to take you in. Or some friend of your family's will. Even if you have to sleep in someone's barn, you will be better off than you are here."

Yes, Angelique thought fervently. Oh, yes! If she had to, and if he were still available, she would even marry Granny Monet's grandson Marcel. After all that had happened to her since she had come to Paris, and especially since that evil day when Jacques had been forced to leave her, marriage to Marcel no longer seemed unthinkable.

"Now, here is what we will do," Madame Budreau said. "You will leave here wearing one of my dresses and cloaks, and that wide-brimmed hat of mine with the ostrich plume curving down on one side of the face. It will conceal your hair entirely. You will be leaning on my son's arm. Fortunately I do not have to send for Bertrand, because he is coming here to have supper tonight. Since it will be dark, and since you will be wearing my clothes and in the company of my son, I do not think any of the guards will doubt for a second that you are me. Just as a precaution, though, you might

feign a coughing fit whenever you pass a guard, and cover the lower part of your face with a handkerchief. Once you are outside the prison, Bertrand will take you to the inn I mentioned and leave you there. I will give you enough money to pay for the inn and for your fare on the stagecoach."

Angelique stammered, "But when Monsieur Budreau finds out . . ."

"That you are gone? He will immediately start concocting some story about your escape that will not reflect upon him or involve my son or me. I would not put it past him to file through one of the window bars in this apartment and then tell his superiors that you must have climbed out the window and then descended to the ground with the aid of the ivy clinging to the walls. A woman prisoner did actually escape that way when a Monsieur Triffault, my husband's predecessor, was warden here."

"But, madame! Your husband will know you helped me. And he will be furious with you."

"Of course. But he will not harm me. He may have turned a little mad, but not that mad! He knows that if he ever raises a finger to me, Bertrand will tear him to pieces."

Tears of gratitude ached in Angelique's throat. "Madame, if only there was some way I could repay you, or even thank you adequately . . ."

Madame Budreau's voice was brisk. "Just say, 'Thank you,' and leave it at that. We do not have time for many words. Now, come into the bedroom and put on that dress. It will be too large for you, so I will pin it in at the waist."

18

ANGELIQUE WALKED DOWN the stretch of dusty road between the village of St. Isidore and the hut in which she was born. The public coach and its other passengers were still back in St. Isidore's square, where the coachman was attending to a

wheel that had been threatening to slip from its axle. Too excited and impatient to sit still, Angelique had decided to walk the rest of the way. Now, moving along between the rows of poplars in her bourgeois clothing—dress and cloak of black worsted, wide-brimmed black hat—she was aware of how incongruous with her surroundings she must appear.

Her escape had gone as smoothly as Madame Budreau had predicted. No guard had hesitated even for an instant to let her and her huge companion pass. Once outside the prison's courtyard, they had walked rapidly to an eastern gate in the city's wall.

The inn was a few hundred feet beyond the walls. Bertrand escorted her inside, nodded a farewell, and left. The innkeeper hurried between the tables to greet her. He and the guests at the tables looked curiously, but without suspicion, at this young woman in somber black. Perhaps they concluded that she recently had been widowed. Certainly there seemed to be a hint of sympathy in the landlord's manner. He showed her to a room where a mother and her daughter, a girl of sixteen or so, were already preparing for bed. They occupied the large bed, and Angelique a smaller one. In the morning she left on her three-day journey.

As the coach rolled past fields and vineyards, bare and bleak beneath the late-October sky, she thought of her journey along this same road two years before. She had worn wooden clogs and peasant blouse and skirt then, and ridden on the jolting seat of a wagon loaded with hogsheads of wine. But there had been a confidence in her then, a heady confidence that a girl blessed with both intelligence and good looks would have little trouble in rising to a position of wealth and power. Now it seemed to her that she had been very young then, and ignorant of far more than reading and writing.

During the journey the passengers talked often of politics. She recognized the names of men—Mirabeau and Danton and Roland, for instance—that Jacques had told her about. She learned for the first time that last July the Assembly had proclaimed a new organization of the Church of France, and that churchmen who had sworn fealty to the new Church were struggling against those still loyal to the Vatican. When she was with Jacques she had listened eagerly to such talk. Once she was imprisoned, though, it was as if the outside

world had ceased to exist for her. She seldom thought of the events that had centered the uneasy attention of every royal ruler in Europe upon France.

She had often thought of Jacques, though, and always with affection, and gratitude, and the hope that he was alive and well somewhere. She was thinking of Jacques now as she crossed the humpbacked bridge where often she had leaned with him against the parapet and looked down into the clear, shallow water. But mostly she thought of her mother. Please, God, she was praying, let me find her well again. Let her recognize me, and take me in her arms.

Now she was passing the hut where she had been born. With a pang she saw that its roof was partially caved in. Obviously no one had lived there since she and her mother left the place. Walking faster despite her long and heavy skirt, she passed the fields, empty except for corn stubble, that lay between the ruined Dubois hut and her Uncle Georges's house.

A boy of about seven stood on the short path leading from the road to her uncle's house. Even though he had grown taller, she recognized him as Georges-Pierre, the next-to-youngest of her uncle and aunt's children. She smiled and said, "Hello, Georges-Pierre."

He looked at her with startled dark eyes and then turned and ran toward the house, crying, "Mama! Papa! There is a lady out here and she knows my name!"

Her aunt and uncle came out of the house. In the instant or two before her uncle exclaimed, "Why, it's Angelique!" she saw that they both looked older and thinner. Then their expressions changed.

Fear and the foretaste of grief gripped Angelique's throat. "Is my . . . is she . . .?"

Her aunt took her arm. "You had best come in and sit down."

Her aunt led her into the largest of the house's three rooms, a room used for both cooking and meal-taking. Her aunt gave her shoulder a slight downward push, and Angelique sank onto a three-legged stool. She asked, past the ache in her throat, "When?"

"Last April," her aunt said. "During the winter she had stopped eating almost entirely. Then she caught a lung fever . . ."

"The priest wrote to you at the last address he had," her uncle said, "but the letter came back."

My mother must have died, Angelique thought, just about the time I was sent to prison.

She wept then for several minutes, her body sob-shaken, her hands covering her face. No one said anything. After a while she reached into her pocket for a handkerchief and blotted the tears from her face. Then she just sat there, dull-eyed.

A small hand reached out and touched the heavy material of her cloak. "Are you rich?"

Angelique saw that a girl of about nine was standing close to her. Was this Louise or was it Paulette?

"No, I am not rich."

"You cannot blame Paulette for thinking you might be," Angelique's aunt said. "Those are fine clothes you are wearing."

"A . . . a woman I worked for gave them to me." She had decided even before the coach left the inn outside Paris that she would say nothing about those terrible months in prison. In fact, she would say as little as possible about her entire two years in Paris.

"Besides these clothes, all I have is three francs and twenty centimes." That was true. Her coach fare and three nights' lodgings at inns had taken all the rest of the money Madame Budreau had given her.

Her aunt asked sharply, "Then what do you intend to do?"

Angelique's voice was dull. "I don't know. I just . . . wanted to see my mother. And I wanted to leave Paris."

After a moment her uncle said, "If you like, there will still be enough light this afternoon for you to visit your mother's grave in the village churchyard. And later you can come back here and stay for a few days. But no longer, Angelique. There isn't the room, there isn't the food. Two solid weeks of rain last spring rotted the seed in the ground."

Although there were seven children and three adults crowding this small room, for perhaps a minute there was no sound. Then Angelique steeled herself to ask, "Is Marcel Monet still here?"

"Here, and married," her aunt said. She was not really an unkind woman, just hardened by a too arduous life. Never-

theless, she could not keep a note of sour triumph out of her voice. "He married Yvette Dupin soon after you left here. I told you you should have grabbed him while you could."

Angelique stared mutely at the floor.

After a while her aunt went on, "There is a chance you can get work, if you are not too grand to take it."

Angelique lifted her gaze. "The only grand thing about me is these clothes, and they were given to me. Now, what sort of work is it?"

"Housemaid or kitchen maid at the château. They had a smallpox epidemic there last summer. In fact, the old comte, the Duc de Rhoulac's uncle, died of it. So did the chef they had then. And a lot of the staff were badly scarred by it. The marquise, Monsieur le Duc's daughter, said she could not stand the sight of them, so all of those with pockmarks were dismissed. The story in the village is that the château's kitchen is still understaffed. Monsieur le Duc has given orders that no one can be hired without the approval of the chef, and he is very particular. He dismissed my Denise after one day there"—she nodded toward the eldest daughter, a plain girl of about fourteen—"because she had what he called a clumsy look about her. But he might hire you."

She paused and then added, "Not in those clothes, though. You will have to wear a blouse and skirt." Her voice sharpened. "Where are your other clothes? You are not carrying anything but that reticule, are you?"

Even before she and Bertrand had reached the inn outside the Paris walls three nights ago, Angelique had realized that she should have brought her blouses and skirts with her. But in her haste to escape before Monsieur Budreau's return she had given no thought to gathering up her own clothing. Evidently Madame Budreau had not thought of it either.

She said, "I . . . I had an old portmanteau that my ex-employer gave me, but I left it at an inn."

"Well, you can borrow something of mine to wear up to the château. And if they hire you, you can soon buy a blouse and skirt of your own and return mine to me." She added, "That is, if you want to work up at the château."

The château of the de Rhoulacs, the friends of a certain Englishman. She felt almost literally sick at the thought of living in that vast place where Richard Lansing had been a

guest for several weeks, that place a grief-crazed Simon had invaded in an attempt to avenge his dead son.

After a while she said in a flat voice, "Of course I will go up there, the first thing in the morning. What else can I do?"

19

THE NEXT DAY dawned cold but clear, with frost glittering in the hollows of the empty fields. Wearing Madame Budreau's cloak against the chill, but with her aunt's faded blue blouse and skirt underneath, Angelique went up the footpath to the château. As she climbed, she tried not to think of the afternoon two years earlier when Simon, with pain and rage in his heart, had climbed this same path.

She was not surprised to see that the open gate in the château's encircling wall was no longer guarded by soldiers, but by a sturdy-looking man of about fifty in ankle-length pantaloons and a coat, both of rough brown homespun. One would hardly expect the Paris Assembly to have continued the king's policy of supplying military guards to noblemen's country estates.

The guard said, "What do you want, girl?"

"I have heard the château needs kitchen maids."

"It does, but . . . You're from this district, aren't you?"

"Yes." As she realized, her two years in Paris had affected her regional accent only slightly.

"Well, Monsieur Raoul is from Paris. He was chef there to the richest banker in France. He is very high and mighty, Monsieur Raoul is. All the people on his staff now were brought with him from Paris."

Spirits sinking, Angelique asked, "Every one of them?"

"Oh, he has hired a few local girls, but they have not lasted long. You can try, though."

He led her over the cobblestones, around the base of a corner turret soaring perhaps sixty feet into the air, and along

the château's southern wall to a short flight of descending steps.

"That is the kitchen door down there. Good luck," he added, and turned back toward the gate.

She went down the steps, knocked on an oaken door. After a moment it opened, revealing a middle-aged brunette with a sharply pointed nose. She wore a gray cotton blouse and skirt and a white ruffled cap that hid all but a few strands of her hair.

"Yes?"

"I am in need of employment, and I hear that Monsieur Raoul . . ."

The woman opened the door wider. "Come in."

Angelique stepped into a large stone-floored room. Even though the kitchen was below ground level, a line of windows set high in the wall let in a flood of bright morning sunlight. She caught a swift impression of several women, all in gray skirts and blouses and white ruffled caps, moving about the room, and of a boy of about fifteen scrubbing a skillet at a long wooden sink.

The woman who had admitted Angelique called, "Monsieur Raoul!"

A man carefully closed the iron door of an oven set in the brick facing of a mammoth fireplace at the far end of the room. With dignified slowness he turned, saw Angelique, and moved toward her. He was a thin, tall man, and the high white hat he wore made him look even taller.

"Monsieur," the woman said, "here is a girl looking for work."

No prince of the blood could have appeared more haughty than he did as he stared down the sides of his beaked nose at Angelique. He said, "Show me your hands."

She held out, palms upward, the hands that had cooked and scrubbed and cleaned in the Budreau apartment for twelve hours and more each day. He said with cold approval, "I see you have worked hard. Are you a clumsy person? I will not abide a helper who drops or spills things."

"I am not clumsy, monsieur."

He looked down at her silently for several moments. She could see that something about her—perhaps her face or manner, perhaps the good cloak she wore over her peasant

clothing—puzzled him, but he made no comment. Instead he asked, "What is your name?"

"Angelique Dubois, monsieur."

"Very well, Angelique. I shall give you a trial. You will not cook, of course. I allow no helper to make even a salad until he or she has been with me six months. After a year, I may permit you to attempt a simple sauce. But at the start you will perform such tasks as peeling and chopping fruits and vegetables, and plucking geese and chickens.

"You will be paid five francs a month to start. You will sleep up in the servants' quarters, of course. Jeanne will take you up there now so that you can leave your cloak."

Angelique did not find those first weeks at the château unpleasant. Because there were fewer than a score of servants now sleeping in the attic quarters that once had housed as many as sixty, she had a room up there, really only a cubicle, all to herself. Her work in the kitchen was easier than that she had performed at earlier times in her life, easier than wielding a sickle beneath a blazing sun, or rushing back and forth to supply thirsty customers at Etienne Ponselle's inn, or keeping house according to Madame Budreau's exacting standards.

True, Monsieur Raoul was also a perfectionist, so much so that his staff lived in a constant state of nervous anxiety. One disapproving look from him, Angelique noticed, had a far more cowering effect than all of Charles's explosions used to have upon the Ponselle kitchen staff. But he did not impose unnecessary physical strain upon his workers. He made no objection to the women sitting on high stools at the worktable rather than standing, as long as their performance was the best they could give.

She soon learned that although Monsieur Raoul was renowned for his pheasant stuffed with truffles, his terrine of salmon, and his complicated sauces, it was because of his baking that he had been called the greatest chef in Paris. She marveled at the creations which came out of his oven—spun-sugar desserts in the shapes of tiny castles or sailing ships, croissants with a brown glaze that charmed the eye and a butter-rich flavor that delighted the palate, and pastry baskets which looked like woven straw, and which were filled with candied violets and rose leaves.

As footmen carried tray after tray of these creations up an inner stairs to the dining salon, Angelique reflected with wonder that all this marvelous food had been prepared by a staff of eight, including herself and the potboy, to please the taste buds of just two people, the aging Monsieur le Duc and his widowed daughter, the marquise. Large amounts of food came back from the ducal table. Sometimes a whole dish was returned untouched. Which was why the kitchen staff, even the potboy, ate far better than many of the richest people in France.

Moving by way of a back staircase from the kitchen to her attic cubicle, Angelique caught nary a glimpse of the rest of the enormous house. On each landing of the servants' stairs, the door leading into the main part of the house was always closed. When she had been there three weeks, though, she did catch a glimpse of the marquise. That morning Angelique had reported to the kitchen despite a raspy soreness in her throat. After taking one look at her flushed face, Monsieur Raoul had ordered her back to bed.

"And if that does not cure you, stay up there tomorrow too. I will have no sneezing and coughing in my kitchen."

Around nine that morning, looking out the window of her little room, she saw the marquise cross the courtyard in a riding habit of bottle-green velvet. She looked heavier than Angelique remembered from the few times during her growing-up years when she had seen the noblewoman riding horseback along the road or staring haughtily straight ahead as a coach carried her through the village. How much her face had changed Angelique could not tell because of the distance that separated them and because of the plumed hat the marquise wore. A groom helped her mount a sleek bay horse, and she rode off through the château gates. For the two days more that her cold kept her in her room, Angelique watched the marquise ride off each morning.

But even when she had been at the château more than a month, she had not caught a glimpse of Monsieur le Duc, even though one night after dark, standing at her window, she saw one of the ducal coaches, perhaps with Monsieur inside it, rattle into the courtyard from the stables and then out of her line of vision. From talk in the kitchen she learned that Monsieur seldom left his château anymore, so aged and saddened was he by the events of the past two years—the fall

of the Bastille, the enforced move of the king and his family from Versailles to Paris, and the transfer of all but token power from his Majesty's hands to the men sitting in the assembly.

The kitchen staff sympathized with Monsieur le Duc's sorrow, because they were all staunch royalists, even down to the potboy. Often Angelique amused herself by thinking of the horror that would leap into their faces if she told them that for months she had lived with a member of that Assembly, a member so much more radical than the others that he'd had to flee Paris, lest he be arrested on a trumped-up treason charge.

In later years she used to wonder what the rest of her life would have been if she had not come face to face with the Duc de Rhoulac. Suppose that during her first weeks in the kitchen she had committed the high crime of dropping something, and so had been dismissed. Monsieur le Duc in all probability would never have learned that she existed, let alone that she had lived and worked beneath his roof.

But they did come face to face, two weeks before Christmas.

It happened because the château was understaffed upstairs as well as in the kitchen. The majordomo, determined to be just as finicky as the celebrated chef, had been rejecting new applicants among local girls and young men on the grounds that they appeared too dim-witted or too thick-fingered to handle the almost priceless de Rhoulac china figurines, crystal candelabra, and collection of porcelain snuffboxes dating from the reign of Henri III to the present.

In the past the reduced staff had been adequate, since there were only two family members and almost never a guest. But now, at the marquise's insistence, the château would be entertaining almost a dozen guests from the day before Christmas until the sixth day afterward. Swallowing his pride, the majordomo turned to Monsieur Raoul. Could the chef spare at least one member of his staff to help prepare guest bedrooms upstairs? Said staff member would be returned to the kitchen in a few days.

Monsieur Raoul chose Angelique. She was not sure why. Perhaps it was because she was the newest and therefore least valuable member of his staff. Perhaps it was because, even though one of her tasks had been to carry pots and pans back

and forth between the worktables and the mammoth fireplace and oven, she had never once spilled a drop of anything. Perhaps that made both the chef and the majordomo feel that she could be trusted with *objets d'art*.

Whatever the reason, she was chosen. Even though she still slept in her attic cubicle, she began to spend her days above-stairs in the de Rhoulac family quarters, with their thickly carpeted halls, their splendid but now dusty guest rooms, their magnificent dining salon where crystal candelabra shone down not only upon the long table but also on the glass cases holding Monsieur's snuffbox collection. In the vast marble-floored entrance hall, one of the footmen told her, a masked ball would be held on Christmas night.

During her first few days of working abovestairs, she twice caught glimpses of the marquise, but none of Monsieur le Duc. She learned that he spent most of his time in his own bedroom and dressing room, even taking many of his meals there, and leaving his daughter to sit in solitary splendor in the dining salon.

And so it was not until Angelique's fourth day above stairs that she saw him.

After dusting a wall mirror in an otherwise thoroughly cleaned bedchamber, she turned around in time to see an elderly man start to pass the open doorway. He glanced at her and then stopped stock still, faded blue eyes wide and unbelieving in the seamed face beneath his white peruke. Something slipped from his hand and shattered on the stretch of polished floor between the hall and the bedchamber's Aubusson carpet.

She cried, "Oh, what a pity!" and darted forward to pick up the scattered pieces.

His voice, high and sharp with excitement, stopped her in her tracks. "Leave it, leave it! It is of no consequence whatsoever." Later she was to learn that it had been a two-centuries-old-snuffbox for which Britain's Prince of Wales, the art-loving son of mad George III, had offered three hundred English pounds.

The old man, thin and brittle-looking in his blue velvet breeches, silver-embroidered waistcoat, and blue coat, moved toward her with surprising speed. He asked in that same high, agitated voice, "Do you know who I am?"

Puzzled and a little alarmed, she answered, "Yes, monsieur. You are Monsieur le Duc de Rhoulac."

"And you? Who are you?"

"My name is Angelique Dubois, monsieur."

"And the name of your parents?"

Her fear sharpened. Was she about to lose this employment she needed so desperately? Had this old man somehow guessed her connection with that man who had been hung from a gallows in the village square more than two years before? Well, lying would do her no good. He could find out the truth easily enough.

She said, "Their names? Simon and Marie Dubois, monsieur."

No anger mingled with the excitement in his old face. With relief she realized that he had forgotten the name of the "mad peasant" who had attacked his uncle. Probably the whole series of events, so tragic to the Dubois family, had been of such little importance to him that the affair had slipped his mind almost as soon as it was over.

"Are both your parents alive?"

She said, trying to keep her voice expressionless, "No. My mother died last spring. My father has been dead for more than two years."

"When were you born?"

Thoroughly bewildered now, she said, "Why, on the sixth of June, 1771."

"It fits," he cried, striking a fist into the palm of his other hand. "It fits!" Then: "Child, I do not seek to offend you, but please answer me truthfully. Do you believe that this Dubois—whatever his first name was—do you believe that he was really your father?"

After a long moment she said, still bewildered, "No, monsieur. My mother told me he was not."

Cords were standing out in the thin old neck. "What did she tell you about your real father?"

"Why . . . why, only that he was a gentleman and that he had died before I was born."

"That is right, child." His voice was shaking now. "He died six months before you were born. Now, come with me."

He caught her hand, drew her with that surprising agility into the hall. As they moved down it, she saw in one of the long wall mirrors the incongruous image of a splendidly clad

old gentleman towing a bewildered-looking girl in peasant homespun.

He led her into a large and rather gloomy bedchamber, with bed hangings and window draperies of brown velvet. The atmosphere was somewhat lightened, though, by a fire snapping in the grate and December sunshine flooding through the window onto a table, its surface holding painted miniatures. He drew her over to the table, handed her a miniature framed in seed pearls. Voice still trembling, he asked, "Whose portrait is that?"

Angelique gazed unbelievably at the miniature of a very young woman. Pale blond hair waving back from a broad forehead and then gathered to fall in curls on one side of a slender neck. Wide set blue eyes. A classic nose, and a tender mouth contradicted by a firm little chin. A blue brocade dress with lace ruching left the shoulders and high breasts mostly bare.

She said, bewildered, "Why, except for that tiny mole near one corner of her mouth, this might be a portrait of me. But of course it cannot possibly be."

"No, it could not possibly be. Instead it is the portrait of my daughter Therese, painted twenty-four years ago, when she was a little younger than you are now." The faded eyes held a happy tenderness. "Angelique, have you begun to understand?"

Dimly, she had. She said, still too stunned to really feel anything at all, "Then, my father . . ."

"Your father, dear child, was my son, Phillipe, Therese's brother. They always looked so much alike that, if they had been the same sex, people would have taken them for identical twins. See for yourself." Hand trembling, he picked up another miniature and gave it to her. "Here is a miniature of my son painted when he was twenty."

She looked down at the miniature of a blond, extremely handsome young man with a white ruffled shirt showing beneath his brown velvet jacket. So this, she thought dazedly, was the man who had begot her. How had they met, this dazzling young aristocrat and the peasant woman who had ended her days mute and vacant-eyed in her brother's house? Had Phillipe de Rhoulac glimpsed Marie Leblanc coming out of the village church one Sunday? Had he, while out hunting, stopped at the Leblanc farm to ask for a drink of water?

"How did he"—she still could not refer to him as her father—"how did your son die?"

"It happened during military maneuvers." His voice ached with an old grief. "His horse toppled backward and crushed him. He was my only son and my only other child. His death left a hole in my heart that nothing, or no one, has ever been able to fill. But perhaps now . . ."

He took her hand. "Come here, daughter of my son." He led her toward a pair of armchairs flanking the fire. "Sit down." Then, when they faced each other: "Now, tell me, my child, everything about yourself."

She said numbly, after a long moment, "Everything?"

"Of course. You are my granddaughter, Angelique. Don't be afraid to talk about yourself. I know that your life must have been very different from what it would have been if I had known years ago that Phillippe had fathered a child. But that is in no way your fault. So tell me everything."

No! There were a number of things she could never tell this eager-voiced old man. She could not tell him that his grandddaughter had gone to a man's room with a knife concealed in her skirt, and in her hate-filled heart a confused desire to take a life in return for a life. She could not tell him how the man, thinking her a thief as well as a bawd, had raped her and then contemptuously handed her fifteen francs.

No, she could not speak of Richard Lansing to this old man who sat here with tears of joy in his eyes.

She said hurriedly, "My mother, Marie Leblanc, was the only daughter in her family. They owned their farm at one time but now rent it. My mother gave birth to me about five months after she and Simon Dubois were married. A little more than a year later my brother, Claude, was born."

She paused, hands clasped tightly in her lap, and then went on, "When I was seventeen my brother . . . died. My father died only . . . only a little while later. I don't mean my father, of course. I mean the man who raised me as his daughter. My Uncle Georges, my mother's brother, took me in, but there was no room for me, and so I went to Paris to look for work."

"And did you find it, my child?"

"Yes." Her voice became even more hurried. "I worked in a tavern in Montmartre, outside the city walls. Then the day the Bastille was stormed I met an old friend from this dis-

trict. He . . . he asked me to live with him. It was not the way it sounds, monsieur—”

“Grandfather. From now on you are to call me Grandfather.”

She said awkwardly, “It was not the way it sounds, Grandfather. Jacques loved me. I think that probably he still does, wherever he is. But you see, he was in politics.”

From the distaste that flared briefly in the old nobleman’s eyes, she realized that he had guessed what sort of politics she meant. Then he said gently, “Go on, Angelique.”

“Jacques and I decided that it was best, because of the danger in which his political activities placed him, that we not marry.”

Speaking disjointedly now but still rapidly, she told him of Jacques’s flight, and the theft of her small store of possessions, and then her hunger-induced attempt to steal a bracelet.

Unable to face the pity and horror in the old eyes, she looked down at her clasped hands as she spoke of her long months in prison, first in the big iron-barred room, and then as maid-of-all-work in the warden’s quarters. Not just out of consideration for her aged relative, but out of her own reluctance to relive the experiences, she did not tell him of the attack upon her by the monstrous Berthe, or the warden’s peculiar sexual inclinations, or of his attempt to send her plunging to her death down that iron staircase.

“Madame Budreau helped me to escape. Perhaps she felt I had been sufficiently punished for trying to steal that bracelet. Anyway, I came back to this district, and learned that my mother . . .” She broke off until the sudden ache in her throat had eased enough that she could say, “My aunt told me that your chef might hire me to work in the kitchen, so I came here.”

He looked at her, pain and joy mingling in his face. “To think that my beloved Phillipe’s child, my own granddaughter, had to go through such ordeals . . .”

He broke off and then said, “But, my child, never feel that I blame you for your unsanctified relationship with that young man, or for the attempted theft to which you were driven. I could tell you stories of young women raised in noble households who have behaved more heinously than you, and out of sheer willfulness, not necessity.”

Again he stopped speaking for a moment, and then asked, "What did you say the last name of your uncle and aunt is?"

"Leblanc."

"Oh, yes. I remember seeing the name on the tenant rolls my steward shows me. Very well. You are to go to them tomorrow, give them five hundred francs, and say good-bye to them."

"Good-bye!"

"From now on your life must be entirely separate from their lives. From now on your name will be Angelique de Rhoulac. I shall have my lawyers see to it that that becomes your legal name, and that you, as well as Therese, become my legal heir."

She sat there in dazed silence. Five hundred francs! Undoubtedly her aunt and uncle had never even seen that much money in their entire lives. Nor would it grieve them to lose all contact with their niece. Desperately hard-pressed to provide for their own brood, they had never shown much concern for Angelique. Still . . .

She said in a low voice, "Still, my uncle is of my own blood. So are my cousins, his children."

"So am I! I am your grandfather, and as such, closer kin to you than anyone except your father and mother. And they are both . . ." He broke off.

After a moment she said, "But, monsieur . . . I mean, Grandfather! Everyone knows that I am related to the—"

"The peasantry of this district know it! People of my class do not know it, friends and distant family connections in Paris and in Versailles and in various country houses throughout France. I shall tell them part of the truth—that you are my son Phillipe's natural daughter, and that I only recently learned of your existence. But of course no one except myself and my daughter is to know about your . . . your experiences in Paris. I shall tell all my friends that you were raised and educated in a convent near Avignon, a convent in which your mother, a young woman of good family, placed you shortly after your birth."

A convent! Had the years and his sorrows seriously addled his wits? "Grandfather!" For the first time she called him that spontaneously. "Look at my hands!" She held them out. "Do these look like the hands of someone raised in a fashionable convent, with no rougher tasks to perform than needle-

point? And then there is my speech. True, I can read and write, but my accent is that of a peasant of this district."

As he continued to smile at her, blue eyes filled with a joyful tenderness, she said more forcibly, "I know nothing about being a great lady. I have never sat down at a table even with people of the bourgeoisie, let alone the nobility. I do not know how to ride, or even how to enter a room like this one except as a servant."

"My child! Listen to me. Under the supervision of your Aunt Therese you will be taught all that. There will not only be riding instructors. A courier from Paris will supply you with proper clothing, and one of those men of the Paris stage who teach actors to sound like gentlemen will take care of that accent of yours. Until you do look and sound and act like a girl reared in a convent, you will not be introduced to society. That means, of course, that you will not be able to join the Christmas festivities this year. But never mind, my darling. You have a fine intelligence and a supple figure. It will not be long before you walk and talk and sit a saddle as well as any gentlewoman in France."

She said, still too dazed to really accept what was happening, "Madame la Marquise may not want to supervise my . . . my transformation."

Her grandfather's voice held a grim note. "Madame la Marquise is not only my daughter. Since her husband's murder by the peasant rabble who burned his château, she has been completely dependent upon me financially. Oh, she will consent, although it may take a little while for me to persuade her to do so.

"Now, take off that absurd cap." She removed her ruffled maid's cap and laid it in her lap. "That is much better."

She said, "But just by taking off this cap . . . I mean, it does not alter the fact that all the other servants here know that I have been one of them."

"Of course it does not. And it will take them a while to forget that you were ever anyone but Mademoiselle de Rhoulac, my granddaughter. And in the meantime they will talk about you among themselves. That I shall not even try to prevent. But if I gain the slightest hint that one of them has let his or her tongue wag when it should not—that one of them has talked to the guests or even the servants of the

guests who will be here over Christmas—I shall dismiss him instantly.

“In fact,” he went on with a calm arrogance that sent a shiver down her spine, “if anything like that happens, I might turn the lot of them out of doors and replace them with servants from another district. With people starving at the roadsides, it is simple enough to acquire servants. Now, just wait here. I am going to talk to your Aunt Therese.”

He left the room. Angelique sat there, hearing no sound except the snap of the fire in the grate and the ticking of the clock—an ornate gilt one flanked by cupids—on the mantelpiece. What, she wondered dazedly, would the marquise feel? That an old man, out of never-assuaged grief for his son, had been duped by a chance resemblance? Probably. And even if her father managed to convince her that she, Angelique, was Phillipe de Rhoulac’s child, could the marquise reconcile herself to sharing her father’s affection—and ultimately his estate—with the daughter of a peasant woman?

The clock struck the quarter-hour, the half-hour, and then the three-quarters. Evidently her grandfather was having considerable difficulty with his proud daughter. But after a few more minutes she heard them coming. Hurriedly she got up and, as de Rhoulac and the marquise entered the room, dropped a curtsy. When she straightened up she saw that the woman’s cheeks were flushed and her blue eyes bright with displeasure.

The old man tilted Angelique’s chin so that his daughter could inspect the girl’s face. “Now, Therese, can you have any doubt that this is Phillipe’s child?”

The marquise looked silently at Angelique, and Angelique looked at the marquise. In her mid-forties now, the woman was still beautiful, although something—perhaps the murder of her husband—had given her a look of cold hauteur that had not been in the face of that young girl in the miniature.

At last she said, “Yes, I can see that she has the de Rhoulac looks. And since the date of her birth . . .” She broke off, and then, apparently unable to find a more delicate way of putting it, went on, “Since the date of her birth indicates that she was conceived the previous autumn, not long before Phillipe left to join his regiment . . . Well, I suppose one must assume that she is my brother’s child.”

Her father’s voice was dry. “Good. Then you will supervise

the instruction and grooming of your niece, so that she may take her proper place in the world?"

She said after a long moment, "I shall."

Still feeling stunned, Angelique said, "I am very grateful, Madame la Marquise."

"Therese! Tell your niece how to address you properly."

Another silence. Then the marquise said in a reluctant but resigned voice, "You are to address me as Aunt Therese."

20

NO MATTER WHAT jealousy and resentment she might have continued to feel, the marquise undertook the reeducation of her newly found niece with dispatch and efficiency and, as time went on, even a certain enthusiasm. Over that winter Angelique learned not only small things, such as how to curtsy with a slow, graceful, sweeping motion rather than the swift up-and-down bob that had served her all her life. She also learned how to ride, back held very straight, skirt of her pale blue velvet riding habit hiding her right knee hooked over the side pommel and sweeping down to her small booted left foot in the stirrup. Under the tutelage of a stern middle-aged man imported from Paris, she lost all but a trace of her peasant accent.

She learned, from her Aunt Therese, what she should say when the time came for her to be introduced to people of varying rank, from royalty down to a rich cloth merchant's wife. She was taught the steps of the schottische and the gavotte. She even had to relearn her manner of walking. Instead of the free stride of a lower-class girl, wearing beneath homespun outer garments only a pair of drawers and perhaps a shift, she learned to move with the graceful slowness imposed by stays and by panniered dresses heavy with embroidery.

She was a quick pupil in every respect but one. Even though her hands soon became as white and soft as her

aunt's, and even though a music teacher came from Paris to give her lessons, it was apparent almost from the first that her slender fingers, long used to hard labor, would never master the spinet.

She had been living as the Duc de Rhoulac's granddaughter less than a week when, carrying a silk purse that held five hundred francs in the form of golden louis, she went to see her Uncle Georges and his family. Both her grandfather and Aunt Therese had finally consented to her pleas that she be allowed to go there on foot wearing her old skirt and blouse, covered by that cloak Madame Budreau had given her.

Nevertheless, as soon as she had made them understand what had happened, Uncle Georges and his family looked at her with as much awe as if she had arrived, wearing satin, in one of the de Rhoulac coaches. Finally her uncle said, "So it was the de Rhoulac son who fathered you. We all knew it could not have been Simon. But I never thought of it being Monsieur le Duc's son and I will wager no one else did either, mainly because by the time you were born he had been long gone from the district, long enough that people had begun to forget about him."

Angelique said, wretched with embarrassment, "My . . . my grandfather said that today is to be my good-bye to you. I am not to come here again."

Her aunt, who had been staring at the coin-laden purse on the table, looked up and nodded briskly. "And quite proper, too. Now that your grandfather has claimed you, there is no reason for you to have anything more to do with people like us."

So, Angelique thought, I was right about the Leblanc family's reaction. Those golden coins more than compensated for the loss of a niece. To them she was already part of another world. As she walked away from her uncle and aunt's little house, she realized that after a while most peasants of the district would forget she had once been one of them.

But she knew that she would not, even could not, forget. She was right in thinking so. Over the next few months there were many surface changes in her. But underneath them she was always aware of being the same Angelique, a girl who had inherited not only the appearance and pride and spirit of the de Rhoulacs but also the earthiness and stubborn endurance of her mother's people. Sometimes, catching an unex-

pected glimpse of her beautifully clad self in one of the long gilt-framed mirrors that ornamented the corridors, she would think, "Why, who is *that*?"

Before she learned to read well, Jacques had read aloud to her *The Taming of the Shrew*. Often she thought of the play's prologue, in which, as a practical joke, a nobleman had installed a dead-drunk tinker named Christopher Sly in a fine bedchamber, and instructed his servants that when the low-born tippler woke up he was to be addressed as "your lordship" and served the finest food, until he was convinced that he actually was a fine gentleman, and that the past life he remembered had been nothing but a dream. Sometimes, upon awakening in her airy bedroom and looking through an open doorway at the array of silver-backed brushes and tall bottles of scent on her dressing-room table, she felt for a moment the same bewilderment that Christopher Sly must have felt.

But of course she was happy over the change in her life. Happy to be always clean, and with silk or fine linen instead of coarse homespun next to her skin. Happy not to be peeling and chopping under Monsieur Raoul's stern gaze, but instead sitting with her grandfather and aunt at table, wielding the silverware her aunt had taught her how to use properly and enjoying the delicious products of Monsieur Raoul's underground domain. And she was happiest of all that, in spite of all the lessons and dress fittings, she still had time to read the books in her grandfather's extensive library.

But she was constantly aware of a shadow, one that had touched her as soon as she decided to apply for work in the château kitchens. It was the thought of the Englishman. He had once been a guest here, and might be again. And now the thought of seeing him again provoked not only loathing but also fear. She had told no one in this district, least of all her grandfather and her Aunt Therese, of what had happened that night in the best guest chamber of Ponselle's inn. But of course Richard Lansing must still remember it. And if he came here again, and recognized her . . .

Thank God that at least he would not recognize the name Angelique. When he asked her to his room that night, obviously he had thought of her as just a loose-moraled tavern wench, someone of so little importance that he had not even asked what she was called. And fortunately she had not volunteered the information.

Richard Lansing was not one of the Christmas guests. Even before the guests arrived, Angelique had made sure he would not be. As she sat with the marquise one day, looking through some colored prints of the latest fashions offered by a Paris couturier, Angelique asked, "Are any of the guests coming from abroad?"

"Why, yes, the Conte and Contessa de Respigni of Savoy are coming."

"But they will be the only foreign guests?"

"Yes." Her aunt looked at her sharply. "Why do you ask? You are not to mingle with them."

"I understand that." Her grandfather, she knew, intended to tell his guests that his natural-born granddaughter, a convent-reared girl, now lived with him, but at present was recovering from an illness, and so would remain in her rooms.

Her aunt continued in a hectoring tone, "You are far from being presentable, my dear. Your accent still betrays your early years. You still hold your fork awkwardly. You still sometimes at table eat too rapidly, like a peasant eager to get back to the wheat field."

Angelique wanted to say: What do you know about how peasants behave in their own houses? What do you know about wheat fields except that it is fun to ride through them in pursuit of game? But all she said was, "I am trying, Aunt Therese."

Although she did stay in her rooms as long as the Christmas house guests remained at the château, she was very much aware of their presence. Often she heard the talk and laughter of men and women passing along the corridor. The night of the masked ball the sound of distant music made it easy for her to conjure up the marble-floored entrance hall, and the enormous crystal chandelier shedding candleglow on pirates and medieval ladies and Roman senators. And each morning, from behind heavy lace curtains she watched the guests, plus the marquise, assemble in the courtyard below, where grooms waited to help them mount for a ride along the roads and across winter-bare fields.

One of the guests caught Angelique's particular attention. She was a brunette who appeared to be about twenty, and who wore a ruby-red riding habit. The first morning Angelique saw her, the girl looked up to follow the flight of a dove

to its cote atop one of the château's turrets. Angelique saw that the upturned face was startlingly beautiful, with pale, creamy skin, finely arched brows above wide-set gray eyes, and cameo-perfect features.

Aunt Therese, Angelique noticed, showed an almost motherly concern for the brunette girl. The first morning the riders assembled in the courtyard, the marquise sharply questioned the groom as to whether the mount for "Mademoiselle de Lentric" was sufficiently gentle and well-schooled.

Because the marquise paid Angelique only the most hurried of visits while the château was full of guests, it was not until after their departure that she had a chance to ask her aunt about the beautiful brunette.

"Her name is Ninon de Lentric," Aunt Therese said. "Her father, the Comte de Lentric, has a large estate near Rouen."

Something in her aunt's manner as she mentioned the comte prompted Angelique to ask, "And Ninon de Lentric's mother? Is she beautiful too?"

"The comtesse has been dead for two years."

So, Angelique thought, perhaps that was the way the wind blew. Through his daughter, the marquise hoped to curry favor with the rich and titled widower, and thus have a chance to end both her widowhood and her financial dependence upon her autocratic father.

In March the Duc de Rhoulac decided that Angelique's lessons in speech and general decorum had equipped her for her first meeting with members of his own world. Accordingly he invited to dinner a certain Marquis and Marquise de Ponfort, almost as old as himself, who occupied a small château about eight miles away. They seemed charmed by Angelique, and asked a few vague questions about what she had been taught "by nuns at the convent," but nothing at all about the circumstances of her birth or about her mother's family. With relief Angelique realized that all the people she would meet through her grandfather would be too well-bred to ask even a remotely embarrassing question.

A few weeks later the marquis and marquise returned the dinner invitation. When Angelique and her aunt and grandfather reached the de Ponfort château, they found that there were seven other guests. Again Angelique realized, with relief, that her speech and behavior were passing muster. What was more, the two unattached male guests, a widower in his

forties and a bachelor two or three years older than herself, were very attentive, seating themselves on either side of her during the musicale that followed the meal.

On the way home in the de Rhoulac coach, her grandfather said, "If you meet either of those two men again, do not encourage him."

"No, Grandfather," said Angelique, who'd had no intention of doing so anyway.

He went on, as if she had not spoken, "One of them is too old for you and the other will never be old enough. He will be like his father, whose main interest when he was sixty was still dancing the gavotte."

"What you mean is," the marquise said, "that by dint of insisting that no suitor is worthy of her, you will manage to keep her with you forever."

The old man glared at his daughter. "As you grow older, my dear, your tongue grows more waspish. If you hope to snare the Comte de Lentric, you had best check that tendency."

Embarrassed for them, Angelique turned and looked out the coach window at a field of potato plants, now only dimly visible in the deepening twilight. She heard her grandfather say, "Besides, the child is still several weeks short of twenty! Why should she marry soon?"

A few weeks short of twenty. Her grandfather was right about that. But so much had happened to her in the last two and a half years that she felt much, much older, old enough that it seemed strange to her that she had experienced only the mild pleasure of Jacques's lovemaking, strange that she had never known those bodily raptures that she had heard about from other women, and even read about in such works as Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*.

Jacques had more than once implied that she was one of those women without much liking for physical love. Was it true? Was she a cold woman, or nearly so?

As she stared out of the coach window, she had no way of knowing that very soon she would learn the truth about her physical nature.

❧ 21 ❧

IN LATE JUNE, a couple of weeks after her birthday, Angelique traveled with her grandfather and aunt for a visit to the de Lentric château near Rouen. Once they reached it, Angelique could well understand why her aunt was so eager to change her status from that of the Duc de Rhoulac's widowed daughter to that of the second Comtesse de Lentric. The château, newer than that of the de Rhoulacs, had been built around 1700, long after such buildings had ceased to be fortified castles and had become country houses. Thus the de Lentric château stood, not on a hilltop, but beside a lake in a pleasant valley. The lake's clear waters reflected the château's walls of pinkish stone, and the rounded turrets which, with their arrow slits, were only a romantic reminder of the times when every château had been manned by armed knights.

The Comte de Lentric himself was a man of about fifty with a grave but pleasant manner, and tastes far more bookish than those of most noblemen. After a fairly lengthy conversation with him, Angelique realized that he must have read at least most of the books assembled in his library with its ceiling frescoes depicting Aristotle, Erasmus, Francis Bacon, and other scholars of the past. His manner to the widowed marquise was unfailingly pleasant, even gallant, but whether or not her aunt would ever become the Comtesse de Lentric, Angelique could not tell.

She did learn one thing, though. The beautiful Ninon de Lentric was just not very bright. Her voice was lovely, low and musical, but she seldom used it to talk of anything but clothes and parties and balls.

On the third day of the de Rhoulacs' visit, Ninon said at the dinner table, "Papa, when will we next visit the king and queen at Versailles? I do so love Versailles!"

After a few moments' embarrassed silence, her father said,

"Ninon, Their Majesties have moved to the Tuileries in Paris."

With an inward shudder Angelique thought of how they had "moved"—in a coach escorted by drunken harridans and by men carrying on pikes the severed heads of the king's personal guards.

And now it seemed unlikely that the royal couple would be allowed for long even the comparative comfort of the Tuileries. Only a week or so ago, accompanied by the queen's admirer, the Swedish Count Fersen, they had attempted to escape in a slow, heavy, and far too noticeable coach. At Varennes, one hundred and twenty five miles from Paris, the town council had stopped the fugitives. They had returned to Paris accompanied by a large, menacingly silent crowd. The talk was that soon they would be transferred to a real prison, perhaps the Conciergerie near the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

The comte went on, "In fact, Ninon, it has been almost two years since the king and queen lived at Versailles."

"Oh, yes," Ninon said, "I knew that, but I had forgotten."

The next day, as the Comte de Lentric and Angelique looked through some of the rare volumes in his library, Angelique spoke of how beautiful his château was.

"Yes," he said, "but it saddens me that I have no male heir. If only I could find a husband for Ninon, so that she might produce a son."

"But surely a girl like that does not lack for suitors!"

"Fortune-hunting fops who—especially married to Ninon!—would be apt to produce offspring as vacuous as themselves. I want her to marry a man of some substance and intelligence. But the few such men who have met her . . . Well, I imagine they could not bear the thought of listening, through the necessary courtship, to talk of panniers and Brussels lace and whether it is more enjoyable to dance the minuet or the gavotte."

Angelique said, embarrassed, "But she is so young! Surely in time . . ."

"My daughter is twenty-five. It is perhaps the absence of thought behind it," he said wryly, "which keeps her face so girlishly smooth."

Angelique and her aunt and grandfather began their journey home the next day. And less than two months after that, the fear that had haunted her ever since she came to live at

the Château de Rhoulac became a reality. Richard Lansing returned to visit his old friends the de Rhoulacs.

For a few days she was blissfully unaware of his presence at the château. In late July the elderly Marquis and Marquise de Ponfort, who had become increasingly fond of her, invited her to spend two weeks with them. Afraid that their young guest might become bored, they tried to provide some sort of entertainment—a card party, dancing, a musicale—each evening. In the afternoons, though, in the little summerhouse out in the small but beautifully tended rose garden, Angelique usually read aloud to her hostess from French translations of Richardson's polite and highly moral novels. Every once in a while, glancing at her hostess's gray head bent over an embroidery frame, Angelique had an almost irresistible impulse to say, "Did I ever tell you how I read *Pilgrim's Progress* to more than a score of thieves and harlots?"

The afternoon the de Ponforts' coach returned her to the Château de Rhoulac, her grandfather's majordomo came hurrying out into the courtyard to greet her. As she stepped down onto the cobblestones he said, "Madame le Marquise and Monsieur le Duc are both occupied at the moment, but I shall send them word of your return."

Leaving other servants to help the de Ponfort coachman to take her trunk from the vehicle's roof, she and the majordomo started across the cobblestones. Then, looking at the several coaches which stood beneath a protective roof on one side of the courtyard, she said, "That coach at the end. Isn't that the de Lentric crest on its door?"

"Yes. Mademoiselle de Lentric arrived yesterday. Her coachman and footman are remaining here until tomorrow morning so that the horses will have a thorough rest. Monsieur le Comte de Lentric was supposed to come with Mademoiselle, I hear, but was prevented by an attack of the gout."

And how that must have disappointed Aunt Therese, Angelique thought.

Then she stopped short. At the end of the line of coaches was another roofed section where saddle horses were sometimes tethered before being returned to the stables in the rear courtyard. A rangy black horse stood there, nose buried in a feed box.

Instantly she was transported back to a day of blazing sun.

Again she saw a black horse soaring over the wall into the wheat field. . . .

Nonsense, she told herself. The world was filled with black horses. The marquise, who was still an excellent horsewoman, had bought a new hunter, that was all.

A few moments after she reached her rooms, servants brought her trunk up, and her maid, a dark, stocky girl named Josette, came in to unpack and to help Angelique out of her traveling costume and into a dress of pale blue muslin. As the girl, pleasant but deferential, brought blue satin slippers from the drawer of the tall mahogany wardrobe, Angelique thought of how adaptable human nature was. Last winter, when Josette first had been assigned to her as a personal maid, there had been covert resentment in the girl's attitude. Angelique had understood it. After all, she and Josette had been fellow servants in this place. But now, less than a year later, Josette's manner toward Angelique was much the same as her manner toward the marquise. It was as if she almost had forgotten that her mistress had ever been anyone but Mademoiselle Angelique de Rhoulac.

But then, that seemed to be the case with all the people of the district. They appeared to think of her only as a de Rhoulac. That was true even of her Uncle Georges. Weeks ago a de Rhoulac coach, with Angelique sitting alone inside it, passed Uncle Georges's cart on the road. The cart was drawn not by one but two sleek oxen, no doubt bought with some of those gold coins of Monsieur le Duc. Holding the reins, her uncle had bowed and given her a slight deferential smile. Angelique had a not entirely happy feeling that he had ceased to regard her, even in his thoughts, as his niece.

Only one person still seemed vividly conscious of her former self. He was Marcel Monet, Granny Monet's grandson. In late spring, as she rode on the gentle mare her grandfather had given her, she met Marcel walking with an obviously pregnant young woman, no doubt his wife, along the roadside. He had pulled off his cap and bowed, but the look he gave her was as close to a sneer as he dared to make it. Obviously he had not forgotten that sun-brown, bare-legged peasant girl who had spat in his face.

Someone knocked on the door. Josette opened it to reveal a footman standing in the hall.

"Monsieur le Duc sends his compliments to Mademoiselle, and requests that she join him in the salon."

Slipped feet noiseless over the thick carpet, she entered the salon a few minutes later and then stopped dead in her tracks. Backs turned, her grandfather and another man stood looking down into the glass case of snuffboxes across the room. Beside her grandfather's shrunken form, his companion looked especially tall and wide of shoulder.

For the second time in an hour she was assailed by an almost unbearable memory. Herself standing naked in a tavern bedroom. A dark-haired, wide-shouldered man moving away from her to sit on the bed's edge to remove his coat, his ruffled white shirt . . .

A roaring in her ears. I must not faint, she told herself. Especially if it is he, I must not faint, must not do anything to give myself away.

She must have made some sort of sound, though, because both men turned, and she found herself looking into Richard Lansing's hawk-nosed face.

Her grandfather began, "So there you are, my . . ." Then: "Angelique, my darling." He moved toward her. "You are so pale. Are you ill?"

She managed to say, not looking at his companion, "It is just that my journey from the de Ponforts' was hot and rather tiring."

"Yes, I suppose it was. But you frightened me, my darling." The dark-haired man had come to stand beside him. "Angelique, this is Sir Richard Lansing, who has come from England to visit us. I have just been telling him how I brought you from the convent to live with me. Sir Richard, this is my granddaughter, Mademoiselle de Rhoulac."

Sir Richard, she thought distractedly. So his father, the baronet, must have died.

She had to look at the tall man now. Instantly she saw that he remembered the girl standing naked in that tavern room. Despite her fear, she felt a wild desire to laugh at the expression on his face, an expression compounded of amazement, bewilderment, and self-doubt. Then she managed to drop him a curtsy. He bowed, and said in his heavily accented French that he was enchanted to meet her.

Monsieur le Duc had been watching them. Now he said,

"Sir Richard, from the way you looked at my granddaughter, one might almost think you have seen her before."

The Englishman had recovered his aplomb. "In a way, monsieur, I have."

Everything inside her seemed to shrink. Was he going to tell? If so, she would deny it, and deny it, and deny it, not only for her own sake but that of the old man who had come to love her so much.

Her grandfather asked, "What do you mean, Sir Richard, 'in a way'?"

"In Florence once I had the great pleasure of viewing Botticelli's *Venus*. Whoever it was who posed for that painting strongly resembled your granddaughter."

Monsieur le Duc beamed at the compliment, but Angelique relaxed only slightly. It was impossible to tell from the Englishman's face, but she felt his words might have carried a hidden barb. From a reproduction of the painting that hung in the cardroom of this very château, she knew that Botticelli's *Venus* stood completely naked.

Smile, she commanded herself. No matter what he said or did, she must maintain the manner of an upper-class maiden when meeting an eligible young man, a manner which should combine demureness and graceful self-possession with just a touch of flirtatiousness.

She murmured, "You are very kind, monsieur."

Again he bowed. When he straightened she saw that his eyes still held that mixture of outraged suspicion and self-doubt. She felt she could read his thoughts. Before him was a girl who, in all probability, was not only an ex-tavern wench but a knife-wielding thief, a girl who somehow had wormed her way into the affections of de Rhoulac and persuaded him to tell that fairy tale about her being his convent-raised granddaughter.

On the other hand, he must be thinking, what if he, Richard Lansing, was mistaken? People said that everyone on earth had a double, someone so similar in appearance that the two of them might pass for identical twins. He must be very careful. If this girl really was de Rhoulac's natural-born, convent-reared granddaughter, the old nobleman would never forgive him for offending her in the slightest way.

Feminine voices outside the doorway. The marquise and Ninon de Lentric came in. The brunette girl looked especially

beautiful in a turquoise velvet riding habit. Her matching hat held an ostrich plume that curved against the smooth pallor of her cheek.

"So you are back, Angelique." The marquise's greeting to her niece was somewhat lacking in enthusiasm. Then, to Sir Richard: "Well, here is your riding companion. As I told you, a ride along the riverbank is especially pleasant at this time of year. So many ferns, and wildflowers like scarlet hibiscus and early goldenrod."

He bowed and then said, "But when Mademoiselle de Lentric looks as she does now, how can I be expected to observe the mere beauties of nature?"

Ninon cast down her eyes and smiled. Angelique found herself thinking: Smooth-tongued bastard!

Sir Richard asked, "But you, madame. Are you not to accompany us?"

"Alas no. I was looking forward to it, but now I find I have a slight headache."

So that is the way of it, Angelique thought. No doubt it was her aunt who had arranged that the Englishman and the lovely Ninon would be the château's houseguests at the same time. If the marquise could make a match between the baronet and the comte's twenty-five-year-old daughter, her own chances of becoming the second Comtesse de Lentric would be greatly enhanced.

Angelique murmured something about how she must see if her trunk was unpacked, curtsied, and left the room.

22

AT SUPPER THAT night Richard leaned across the table gleaming with silver and crystal and said, "I have heard, Mademoiselle de Rhoulac, that the good Carmelite sisters esteem learning, just as . . ." He frowned. "What is the name of the

saint who founded the Carmelite nunneries? I am afraid it has slipped my mind."

"St. Theresa of Avila. I am surprised, Sir Richard, that the name of such a famous and beloved saint should elude you."

Then she warned herself: Careful! There had been an edge to her voice. She must charm him, not arouse his hostility and thus increase the chance that he would try to prove that Mademoiselle de Rhoulac and the naked girl in his bedchamber were the same.

He said, "Ah, yes. St. Theresa of Avila. You must forgive me, Mademoiselle de Rhoulac, if I am less familiar with the calendar of saints than you are. After all, during the reign of Henry VIII most Englishmen ceased to be Roman Catholics."

The marquise said quickly, "But surely, Sir Richard, you would not allow religious considerations to dictate . . ." She broke off, looking confused.

"To dictate my choice in important matters such as marriage? No, madame. I hope you will not think me unduly cynical, but I see it this way. Had Henry's first wife produced a male heir, Henry would not have broken with Rome in order to marry Anne Boleyn. And I would be sitting at this pleasant supper table as a Catholic. No, madame, if Henry was willing to discard one religion for another in order to marry the lady of his choice, then why shouldn't I?"

He turned his head to the brunette girl beside him and let his gaze linger for a moment on the perfect profile as she sat there with downcast eyes. Then he said to Angelique, "But tell me, mademoiselle. It is true, is it not, that the Carmelite nuns teach their young charges more than the catechism and needlepoint? I have heard that pupils in such nunneries learn not just to read, but to read from the works of Aristotle and Aquinas, for instance."

His dark brown eyes were saying: Now, how are you going to handle *that*, you illiterate, thieving tavern wench?

It was her grandfather who replied, "Angelique reads well, not only in French, but in English. She oftens reads to me in French."

"She reads *English*?" Sir Richard's social mask had slipped. He looked frankly incredulous, and more than a little angry.

Angelique said demurely, "Dear Grandfather! You exaggerate my abilities. But perhaps Sir Richard would like to

judge for himself. Perhaps later on, in the library, he would like for me to read something to him."

She spoke the last words with a calculated air of timidity, as if hoping he would say something like: "My dear mademoiselle, I would never dream of putting you to the test. And mellifluous as your reading voice may be, I would much rather look at you."

As she had expected, he said nothing of the sort. He folded one of his long elbow-propped hands over the other and said with a slight but unmistakable note of challenge, "I should very much enjoy hearing you read, especially in English."

Less than half an hour later in the library adjoining the salon, Richard Lansing and Angelique moved past the shelves of leather-bound volumes. "Ah, John Donne!" he said, pulling a book out from its row. "Our great metaphysical poet, at least in the later stages of his life. He became dean of St. Paul's, you know."

Richard leafed rapidly through the book. "Here is one I am not familiar with. Its title is *My America*, a country I love. Would you read this one, please?"

"Of course."

Before she had read more than a few lines, she realized that this poem must have been a product of Donne's young manhood, when his inspirations were physical, not metaphysical. She also realized that Richard had known very well what he was doing when he chose it. Under the guise of writing a description of the American continent, the lustful young Donne had composed a poem about a lover exploring with eyes—and hands—the naked body of a woman stretched out beside him. Cheeks burning, Angelique read stubbornly on, until her eyes, moving ahead, saw that the next lines, while not as bawdy as some passages of Rabelais, had been designed with far more intent to arouse the reader erotically.

She snapped the book shut and thrust it back onto the shelf. "I really think," she said coldly, "that that is quite enough of that."

She could see pleasure in his eyes that he had made her blush. But whether she had increased or lessened his doubts about the old nobleman's account of her origins, she could not be sure.

He said smoothly, "Forgive me, mademoiselle. As I said, the poem was unfamiliar to me. Of course, soon after you be-

gan to read, I perceived the poet's wicked intent. If I had known you perceived it too, I would have taken the book from your hands. But I said to myself, an innocent, convent-bred young woman probably would think that when the poet writes of two rounded hills he means hills, and that when he speaks of a ferny dell . . ."

He broke off. Too angry to remain on guard, she glared at him silently.

The marquise entered the room. "Come into the salon, you two," she said. "Sir Richard, you have a treat in store. Mademoiselle de Lentric has consented to play the pianoforte and sing for us."

Several hours later, in the large bedchamber which had been assigned to him, Richard Lansing sat down in a straight chair and removed a steel-buckled shoe. For a moment he sat there with the shoe in his hand, resisting an impulse to hurl it against the wall. Even if it turned out that the girl could read Aristotle in the original Greek, his every instinct told him that she was the same thieving little bitch who had come to his room that night with a knife concealed in her clothing.

And he wanted to prove it. He wanted to prove not only to himself but also to the Duc de Rhoulac that the girl he called his granddaughter was in reality a lowborn thief who—heaven only knew how!—had insinuated herself into this household and into the old man's affections. Richard *needed* to prove it, not only to protect his aged friend but also to salve his own conscience.

Because his conscience had bothered him at intervals ever since that night in his chamber at Ponselle's inn. It was not just because he had deflowered a virgin. Virgin or not, she had admitted that she had come there to rob him of a considerable sum of money. But there was something about the way she had crept from the room, weeping . . .

Sometimes he wondered if she really had intended to rob him. But why else should she have brought a knife with her? In fact, why else should she have come to his room at all? Virgins usually did not accept a complete stranger's proposal that, for a fee, they share his bed for an hour—or, if they did accept, they made sure ahead of time that the fee would be a large one.

Yes, he needed to find out the truth, and he would find it

out. Just how, he did not know. It would have to be by some discreet means, discreet enough that, if it did turn out that she was de Rhoulac's convent-bred granddaughter, the old man would never be hurt and angered by the knowledge that his young friend had questioned that fact.

Whoever she might be, Angelique was a lovely creature, and never more than when, cheeks flaming, she had plowed ahead through that lascivious poem. Convent-bred or not, she had understood those *double entendres*. What was more, he had a feeling that against her will she had been erotically stirred by reading those lines to him, just as he had been stirred by seeing those words formed by her lovely lips.

He swore, dropped the shoe in his hand, took off the other one. If he started thoughts like that, he would never get to sleep.

Think of the other one. Think of Ninon de Lentric. She was just as lovely as whatever-her-real-name-was. Some might say even lovelier. And she was very rich, a consideration not to be overlooked by a young baronet interested in improving the somewhat run down estate left him by his father.

The trouble was that five minutes of conversation with Ninon left him wanting to bolt for the nearest door. But after all, a man should not mind that in a wife. How much conversation was required to beget sons? What was more, whenever as a married couple they dined out, he would not have to sit next to her and listen to her chatter about the latest style in draping a skirt. That would be the lot of some other man. And since her English was only fragmentary and her face very beautiful, perhaps her dining and dancing partners at London gatherings might never discover that the girl could be a truly stupefying bore. As for the hours he would spend alone in her company, well, they could be fairly few. The coffee house he patronized in London had provided comfortable rooms for its customers, and he often stayed there.

Besides, there was something appealing about Ninon, especially the sadness that sometimes came into her lovely gray eyes. Plainly she realized that she was a disappointment to her father. Plainly she realized that, at twenty-five, she would soon be considered a spinster rather than a maiden.

Richard knew very well that the marquise hoped to make a match between himself and Ninon. Probably he should allow

her to. After all, how many men of his class had wives who offered real companionship?

And yet, he reflected, it would be pleasant to have such a wife, a woman with not only a lovely, responsive body but also a mind that could strike sparks from your own. A woman with whom to jest, and discuss books, and even argue, as well as slake your desire.

A soft knock at the door. Richard said, "Come in."

The elderly footman, Damien, who had been assigned to Richard as a valet, came into the room. "Monsieur, I am sorry not to have come sooner. The truth is that I sat down in a chair to rest for a moment, and I fell asleep."

"It does not matter, Damien. As I have told you, I really don't need you in the evening."

In fact, Richard could have dispensed with Damien's services in the mornings too. The sight of a razor in the old man's not-very-steady hand was disquieting, and yet Richard did not want to risk getting Damien into trouble with the majordomo by refusing to allow the footman to shave him. So far he had not received even a nick.

"Why don't you go to bed?" Richard asked.

"Thank you, monsieur."

For perhaps a minute after the old man had gone, Richard stared at the closed door. Yes, there probably was a way of finding out the truth about Angelique, or whatever her name was, quickly and easily. At least it was worth trying.

He took off his brocaded coat and then finished undressing.

23

FOR THE NEXT three days, as she played piquet with her grandfather and his two houseguests, or, with her aunt, accompanied Richard and Ninon on horseback rides, Angelique was in a constant state of tension. Had the Englishman, she wondered, finally accepted her grandfather's version of her

life? Or did he, sly scoundrel that he was, intend to wait until she was entirely off guard and then confront her with indisputable evidence of the truth about herself?

On the fourth day she found that he indeed had been just biding his time. Near sunset she moved along the graveled path of the rose garden behind the château, selecting the large white blooms which she liked to keep in her bedroom. She had just scissored a long-stemmed rose from its bush and placed it in the basket she carried over her arm when she heard crunching footsteps behind her. She turned to see a smiling Sir Richard.

He said, "White roses? For your bedchamber?"

"Yes."

"I should have thought you would have chosen those pale yellow ones over there. They are almost the exact shade of your hair, although they lack its lovely sheen, of course."

"You are always so gallant, Sir Richard."

"Always? On one occasion you did not seem to think me gallant." He paused. "Which reminds me. I saw your old employer, Etienne Ponselle, in the village earlier today. He will be calling upon you here at the château."

The scissors dropped from her hand, narrowly missing her slipped foot. He bent and picked them up. When he straightened he said, "Why, mademoiselle! How pale you are."

Heart pounding, she decided to brazen it out. After all, it was almost certain that he had lied. What reason would Etienne Ponselle have to come to this tiny village?

"Am I pale? I cannot imagine why. And I cannot imagine whom you mean when you mention my old employer. Certainly I know no one named . . . what did you say the name was? Perrault?"

"Ponselle. Etienne Ponselle."

"I have never known anyone of that name. May I have my scissors, please?"

His voice was cold now. "I have reason to think that you are not to be trusted with sharp instruments." Nevertheless he laid the scissors in the flower basket. "As for Ponselle, of course he is not in the village. I merely wanted to see if you would give yourself away, which you did."

From perhaps two hundred feet behind her she heard the snip-snip of shears. Apparently a gardener was trimming the

tall yew hedge which separated the rose garden from the orangery. She said, voice shaking, "I have not the faintest idea of what you are talking about. But if you must talk nonsense, please keep your voice down."

"If it is nonsense, why are you afraid for a gardener to hear it?" Nevertheless he lowered his voice.

"Now, stop pretending, my girl," he went on. "Don't you think I have more to base my convictions on than the fact that you turned pale and dropped a pair of scissors? Why, two days ago I persuaded Damien, the man assigned to me as a valet, to talk about you."

"I don't believe you! My grandfather ordered all the servants . . ."

She broke off, dismayed.

He said, "I know. De Rhoulac ordered the servants not to talk about you under pain of dismissal. But I persuaded Damien that Monsieur le Duc had somehow been taken in by you, that in reality you were a disreputable, even dangerous person." He paused, remembering how the old face had reflected the struggle between Damien's reluctance to disobey instructions and his fear that if he did not speak the man he had served and loved for a lifetime would continue to be deceived and defrauded.

"He told me, finally, that you had first come to the château as a kitchen maid named Angelique Dubois. Later you became a housemaid. Shortly after that de Rhoulac gathered the staff together and told them that you were his granddaughter, that from then on your name was Mademoiselle Angelique de Rhoulac, and that if he learned that any of his servants had gossiped about her, that servant would be instantly dismissed."

"And so then," Angelique said bitterly, "you went to the other servants—"

"No, poor old Damien had told me enough. It was not necessary to plunge any of the other servants into conflict. Instead I went down to the wine shop in the village. I asked the proprietor if he knew whether a certain Angelique Dubois had ever gone from this district to Paris. Before he could answer, a young fellow standing there said that you had, almost three years ago. He said that you had gone to work in a tavern just outside the Paris walls in Montmartre, and that the wife of your employer had written a letter for you to the St.

Isidore village priest, asking about your mother. He said that the priest told the intendant about the letter, and the intendant told other people."

Angelique asked, white to the lips, "The man who told you all this. Who was he?"

"He said his name was Marcel Monet."

It would be, she thought bitterly. Aloud she said, "Very well! I was born Angelique Dubois. The man I called father was Simon Dubois, even though he was not really my father. Everyone realized that . . . that someone else must have been. After Simon . . . died, I went to Paris and worked there for a while. Then I came back here and went to work in the château kitchen. My grandfather knows all that, so why do you think you can frighten me by—"

"Does de Rhoulac know that you came to my room like any common whore, except that you were carrying a knife with which to rip open my saddlebags and steal my money? Or my father's money, rather, since it was obtained from the sale of his French lands. No, I'll wager you did not tell him that, or a number of other things either."

She said, very pale, "Have you told him?"

"No, not yet. I felt I should give you a chance to persuade me that I should not tell him."

After a long moment she said, "I knew you were brutal and selfish, with no thought for anything but your own gratifications. But until now I did not realize just how vile you are."

"Vile? Oh, I see. You think I am waiting for you to bribe me into silence, with your body as the bribe. You don't look like a slut, Angelique, but you certainly think like one. How can you imagine you could bribe me that way or any other way, if I thought you were deliberately and cold-bloodedly exploiting the Duc de Rhoulac, who is not only my friend but also a distant kinsman from several generations back?"

"No," he went on, "what I meant was this. I have never felt . . . easy in my mind about what happened that night at Ponselle's inn. Always I have wondered if the circumstances were exactly what they seemed. Perhaps if we meet someplace privately, and talk frankly, I will find some justification for not telling de Rhoulac what I know about you."

She thought grimly: You will get the truth, all of it, right in your face.

Aloud she said, "It will have to be a long talk, Sir Richard. And where can we talk for long without fear of interruption? We could ride out together, but I am sure the marquise would insist that she and Ninon accompany us."

"Probably." His faint smile told her that he was aware of the marquise's matchmaking intent. "Then shall I come to your rooms at eleven tonight, say?"

"No! The marquise's rooms are directly across the corridor from mine."

"Well, my rooms would be a better choice anyway. They seem to be the only occupied rooms on the third floor of the north wing. Will you come there at eleven?"

In an establishment which employed a score of servants, some of whom stayed up late to bank fires and bar lower-floors doors after the family retired, the Englishman's rooms might well be about the only place where he and she could talk without fear of being observed or overheard. She looked at him for a long moment, lips set in a straight line, and then said, "Very well."

He started away, then turned around. "But please don't bother to bring a knife with you this time."

He moved toward the château. Looking at his broad back, she had a wild impulse to rush after him, seize the scissors from her basket, and thrust them to the hilt between his shoulder blades. She stood motionless for a few seconds, and then she too moved toward the château to change her late-afternoon muslin for a silk dress suitable for her grandfather's supper table.

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THE RICHLY CARPETED corridor in the north wing was empty at the moment. But as she moved along it, footsteps soundless, she feared that at any second a servant, performing some forgotten task in the unoccupied rooms along this pas-

sage, might step out into the corridor. That was the lesser of her fears, though. What really had tightened everything inside her into a knot was the thought of what Richard Lansing could do to her if he chose.

As she passed a long gilt-framed mirror she caught a glimpse of her slender body in a gown of green silk. If he chose, the Englishman could strip her, not only of that dress, but of everything else she had acquired since last winter. She could lose her lovely rooms, and access to her grandfather's library and garden, and the leisure to enjoy it. Again, as she passed another mirror, she caught a glimpse of herself, and contrasted it with what she must have looked like as a prisoner, in a blouse and skirt no cleaner than those of the brawling, cackling women around her, her face unhealthily pale, perhaps with straw sticking in her hair . . .

If Sir Richard destroyed her grandfather's love for her, stripped her of the old man's protection, she might even find herself back in that dreadful place. After all, she was still a fugitive, with more than four years of her five-year sentence left to serve. If she went back to Paris in search of some sort of livelihood, which she well might have to do if her grandfather turned her out, she might be rearrested. And surely, she thought, feeling an almost literal nausea, if she were again imprisoned, years would be added onto her original sentence to punish her for her escape.

And so she must be far more careful with Richard Lansing than she had been this afternoon. She must not lose her temper, must not anger him. Somehow she must justify her past behavior without condemning his own too harshly, lest she arouse in him a defensive rage. It would be difficult, when her heart was seething with hatred and bitterness and fear, but she would try to speak calmly and matter-of-factly.

She stopped, took a deep breath, tapped lightly on a door. After a few seconds it opened and she slipped quickly into the room. Candles set in wall sconces gave her a swift impression of a heavy dark wardrobe in the style of a century earlier, a bed canopied in dark blue velvet, and two tall arm-chairs with tapestried seats and backs facing each other beside the unlit fireplace.

The Englishman gestured toward the chairs. "Shall we sit there?"

When they sat facing each other, he asked in an even voice, "Well?"

She had already decided upon her opening words. She drew a deep breath and said, "When I came to your room that night at the inn, I did not intend to rob you."

Sardonic unbelief in his dark face. "Why the knife, then? To protect yourself from marauders you might encounter on your way to or from my room?"

She lowered her gaze and said in a flat voice, "I intended to kill you with the knife."

Even though she did not look at him, she could imagine the stupefaction in his face. "Kill me!"

"Yes. But when I got there, I realized that I could not kill you. I could not kill anyone." She forced her gaze up to his face. "So I tried to hide the knife more securely. You turned around while I still had it in my hand. The . . . the only other explanation I could think of was the one about the saddlebags, so I told you that."

"And now you say that you actually intended . . ." His voice held stunned unbelief. "Are you insane? Is that it? Is that why you planned to kill a man you had never seen before until that night?"

"But I had seen you before!" Despite all her resolutions, her voice had risen with remembered grief and rage. "I saw you kill my half-brother!"

"Kill your half-brother! Why, I never knew your half-brother, or you either, not until you came to my room that night. You *are* mad, aren't you?"

She saw his eyes go to the bellrope. What did he intend to do. Call a servant? Have her locked in her rooms while he and his elderly host conferred as to what to do with her?

She cried softly, "Please! Please listen! Do you remember that time about three years ago when you were a guest here at the château? Do you remember hunting one morning?"

"I hunted several mornings."

"This particular day you were chasing a stag. You and your horse leaped into the field where my brother and I were harvesting wheat. I dived out of your path. But my brother was not as quick, and so you leaned over in the saddle and shoved him away, and he fell down. Do you remember that?"

Looking puzzled now, the Englishman nodded. "I remember seeing a woman throw herself to one side, although I did

not really get a look at her. There was a man, or perhaps a youth, who just stood there gaping at me, so I leaned over to push him aside. Was that your brother? If so, I certainly could not have killed him."

She was silent for a moment, fighting for self-control. Then she said, "But you did. When he fell, his head struck a sharp rock and he died."

He stared at her, dismay in his eyes. But despite the quietness with which she had spoken, she could see defensiveness gathering in his face. "I am sorry, terribly sorry. But I certainly did not mean for that to happen. Why, I did not even know he had lost his footing. I was intent on the stag."

Intent, she thought bitterly. Too intent on your sport to even look back, let alone to stop and make sure whether or not you had hurt a fellow human being.

"And I recall now," he went on, "that I started for Calais by coach that same day. From there I sailed for England. And so I never knew about your brother's death. If I had, I could have tried to make recompence."

He meant with money, of course. Just how much money would he have considered adequate to recompense the Dubois family for the death of their Claude, with his man's shoulders and his gentle, childlike heart?

"Why didn't this Simon Dubois you mentioned this afternoon try to get in touch with me in England?"

Her bitterness burst forth. "Because within a few days he was hung!"

"Hung! For God's sake, why?"

"Because he tried to avenge his son's death. Oh, you smashed us, Richard Lansing, you smashed a whole family, just with one selfish, heedless thrust of your hand. My mother's mind could not withstand those two deaths. I left her sitting silent and vacant-faced in my uncle's house, and I went to Paris—"

"Now stop it!" He got to his feet and stood towering over her. "I was careless that day in the field, but I have said I was sorry. And you cannot blame me for everything that happened after—"

"Can't I?" She shot to her feet, aware that her rage was out of control, but unable to do anything about it. "Can't I? I blame you not only for Claude and Simon's death and, quite a while later, my mother's. I blame you for what happened to

me. You are the one who made it necessary for me to go to Paris to find work to feed myself. You are the one who raped me in your room at the inn that night."

His face was dark with rage now. "Have you finished with my catalog of sins?"

"No! Since you are responsible for my having to go to Paris, you are responsible for everything that happened to me there."

"Everything? What things?"

She told him of her life in Paris. The peaceful interlude with Jacques, and after he left the theft of everything she possessed. Her futile search for work, and then her own attempt at theft, and her imprisonment. She even told of the unspeakable Berthe's attack upon her, and of her subsequent decision to become the warden's housemaid, despite the fact that she had been warned of his sexual peculiarities.

"It was his trying to kill me that caused the warden's wife to help me escape. Otherwise I would still be there in that dreadful place—"

"Now hold on! You cannot blame me for your imprisonment. You need not have tried to steal that bracelet. After all, you had another alternative to starvation. There was La Saltpêtrière."

He meant the almshouse, Paris' human dumping ground. La Saltpêtrière, where the insane, along with those too young or too old or too weak to support themselves with either work or crime, lived out their few weeks or months or even years before succumbing to the diseases that infested the place.

She said thickly, "I would have thrown myself into the Seine before going to that place. People like you have not heard what it is like, nor would you ever bother to find out." She lost control completely. Only dimly aware that she courted disaster, she drummed both fists against his chest. "Oh, God! How I hate you, you . . . you murderer, you everything rotten—"

"Stop that!" He caught both her wrists. "I cannot undo anything that happened to your family or to you. All I can say is that I am sorry for all of it, and I have already said that."

"Sorry!" She almost spat the word at him. "Sorry!"

"Nothing I could say would satisfy you, would it?"

Their furious gazes locked. Then, gradually, she saw his

expression change. At last he said quietly, "All right, Angélique. I know you have a right to say anything to me that you choose. I know you have suffered terribly. I would give anything if I could turn the clock back, but I cannot. If there is anything I can do to make at least partial amends, anything at all . . ."

Now, she thought bitterly, he was trying to strip her of the one thing he had left to her—her righteous fury against him, a fury that had helped sustain her for three years now. As the serious dark eyes looked down into her eyes, she could feel the anger drain from her, leaving only the sorrow.

Her lips began to tremble.

Again she saw his face change. He bent his dark head and brought his warm, firm mouth with its full underlip down upon her mouth. Surprise held her motionless for a moment. Then she felt it, an odd thrill deep within her, the first stir of a hunger such as Jacques's lips and arms had never awakened in her.

She twisted her face away. "Let go of me."

"No." His voice was still quiet, but there was a new note in it, a kind of exultant discovery. His right arm went around her, slanting down across her hips, pressing her body tightly to his. His other hand, fingers gentle on her cheeks, held her face. Again he kissed her, lingeringly this time.

He raised his head. She said, in a voice that sounded weak even to her own ears, "Please. Please let me go."

"Why should I, when you don't really want me to?" He was smiling now. "Of course, if I am wrong about that, you are free to start screaming. At least one or two servants will come running. After that you will have the task of explaining how it is that you happen to be in my room at past midnight. But at least you will have stopped my making love to you."

Was it his words that held her silent and unresisting in his arms, or that sense of melting weakness deep within her? She herself was not sure.

He put his hands on her shoulders, pushed the brief sleeves of her dress down along her forearms until her breasts were bare. Still, as if under a spell, she did not move.

"Have they grown more beautiful?" His voice was husky now. "Or was it just, that first time, that I did not bother to really appreciate how beautiful your breasts were?"

He cupped her breasts in his hands, bent to close his lips

gently around one coral nipple, then the other. She was faint with it now, that growing hunger within her. He raised his head, looked down into her face. Then with an inarticulate sound he bent, put one arm under her knees, and carried her over to the bed.

Languid with desire now, she let him undress her, raising her hips so that he could slip the silken gown and embroidered undergarments from her body. He took off the gartered silk stockings. She lay with eyes closed, knowing that he sat on the bed's edge, not touching her, just letting his eyes rove over her face, her breasts, her flat belly, her long, tapering legs. Then she heard the sound of his undressing.

He lay down beside her. Her eyelids, heavy with desire, lifted a little, and she looked up into his intent dark face. He kissed her lips, then lowered his mouth to her left breast. She felt his tongue moving against the nipple, felt a finger of his hand brushing her other nipple. That hunger within her had become a liquid swelling, warm and demanding. His lips left her breast, touched her stomach and the triangle of curling yellow hair where her slender legs met. His hand parted her thighs, stroked their silky inner surface.

She heard a sound, and knew it was her own voice, moaning for satisfaction of that need deep within her, a need that was becoming more intense by the moment. Again she opened heavy-lidded eyes and saw his face, dark and somber with desire. Then she felt his long body's weight, felt his legs pushing her legs farther apart.

His first long, slow thrust seemed to touch the very center of that warm, swollen hunger deep within her. She felt a pleasure she had never experienced before or dreamed of experiencing, a pleasure so great that she cried out softly. But with the pleasure came the increasing need for some sort of release. Eagerly, almost desperately, she arched her body to meet that thrusting, so that it went even deeper.

It was mounting steadily now, that tension, that hunger, that need to feel him deep, deep within her. It was a kind of exquisite torment, a painful delight. She must have release from it, she must! Only dimly aware of what she was doing, she wrapped her legs around him so that their bodies fitted even more closely together.

Just when she felt that she could not stand that exquisite torment an instant longer, release came. Waves of shuddering

delight swept down from the inner core of her. At the same time, she felt the throb of him within her and knew that he had reached his own release.

For a few spent seconds they lay there, still united. Then he lifted his weight from her to lie beside her.

She kept her eyes closed. Now that her treacherous body had taken its pleasure, she was realizing the full humiliation of the past half-hour.

Again she had been the victim of their encounter. And this time it had not been because of his selfishness, as when in pursuit of that stag he had thrust her brother to his death. Nor had it been because of his ruthless anger, as when he had raped her and sent her bleeding and weeping from his room at the inn.

No, this time it was because of her own weakness, a kind of weakness she had not known she possessed, that she had become his victim.

He said softly, "Angelique."

She opened her eyes. "Yes?" Her voice was stony. She wanted to get up from this bed, dress quickly, leave this room, and never enter it again. But first she wanted to make it clear how much she despised him, and how much she despised herself for succumbing to him.

He said, "You haven't felt this way with any other man, have you?"

"I told you. There was only one other man. A wonderful man named Jacques."

"Yes, you told me. But that does not answer my question."

After a moment she said slowly, bitterly, "No, I never felt anything like this with Jacques. And I despise myself for feeling it with you."

"Why?" His voice was almost gentle. "Can't you see that your brother's death possibly might be considered an accident, in that I never willed it to happen, never even meant to hurt him, let alone kill him? And it is true that I treated you badly there at Ponselle's inn. But when you came to my room, how could I know you were a virgin instead of the willing tavern wench you seemed to be? And when you stood there naked and told me you had intended to rob me . . . well, can you blame me for taking immediate and appropriate revenge?"

She did not answer. After a moment he added, "Can't we be friends as well as what we have been tonight?"

She thought of Claude lying dead in that fly-infested room with their mother sitting stunned and dull-eyed beside him. She thought of Simon standing, head lowered, on the scaffold in the village square. She thought of Richard Lansing hurling her onto the bed in Etienne Ponselle's best guest room.

"Friends! How could you and I ever be friends?"

She saw something go out of his face.

"And as for the way I have behaved tonight, like . . . like a harlot, I will let you know for whatever satisfaction it may bring you that I will never forgive myself for it. And I cannot understand it. It must be something I inherited from . . ."

Love and loyalty to the woman who had given birth to her made her break off. He had understood, though. He said, smiling, "Don't blame your peasant blood. From personal experience, I can tell you that the bluest blood is often the hottest. And don't call yourself a harlot. Harlots are almost always cold. Bedding down with a man means so little to them that they can accommodate ten customers a night with almost no expenditure of energy.

"As for our not being friends, well, then we will not be. We will be enemies, if you like." With one long leg, bent at the knee, he pinioned her body. "As long as bed is one of our battlefields, I don't mind having you as an enemy."

"Let me up!" She swung her open palm toward his face.

He caught her wrist and stretched her arm out flat on the pillow. "No," he said.

He bent over her, kissed her mouth gently, lingeringly. Angry with herself and yet helpless, she felt her lips stir in response. And when one of his hands moved down to her breast, she knew that already its nipple stood erect.

It was past two by the ornate crystal clock on her dressing table when she crept back to her room. Dawn was blue-gray at the windows and birds had begun to sing by the time she fell into exhausted slumber.

During that interval she'd had time to think things through. She felt almost certain that not even Richard Lansing would be scoundrel enough to try to turn her grandfather against her now.

As for what had happened between herself and the En-

glishman tonight, there was a simple way to make sure that there would never be a repetition. From now on, she would see to it that they were never alone in each other's company for more than five minutes.

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BECAUSE SHE HAD not slept until daylight, it was past eleven when she awoke. She rang for breakfast. When Josette brought in a tray of croissants and coffee, Angelique saw a small sealed note lying beside the silver coffeepot. The maid placed the tray on the table beside the bed and then handed Angelique the envelope.

"From Sir Richard, mademoiselle."

"Thank you." Angelique threw the girl's face a swift glance. Almost certainly Josette could not read. But did she nevertheless suspect that her mistress had spent most of the night away from this room? Impossible to tell from the girl's stolid expression.

Better to open the note right now, Angelique told herself, while Josette was pouring the coffee. Otherwise whatever suspicion the girl might have would be strengthened. And if servants' gossip reached her grandfather's ears . . .

True, in his joy over discovering the daughter of his beloved Phillipe, the old man had not upbraided her for those months she had lived with Jacques. He had excused them on the grounds that she was alone and unprotected then. He even had said that he knew women of his own class who had behaved far more wantonly.

But she was not alone and unprotected now. And Angelique suspected that those loose-living aristocratic women he referred to had been married. During the months she had lived here she gradually had become aware of the code of her grandfather's class: a married woman who already had provided an heir or two might permit herself a few discreet love

affairs. An unmarried girl had best keep her reputation as unsullied as possible, lest she remain husbandless for life, or even find herself packed off to a convent.

And in her case the consequences might be even more terrible. Again she had a vision of herself stripped of this safety and comfort she had found beneath her grandfather's roof. She thought of herself back in tumultuous Paris, perhaps even back in prison. . . .

No, just as her grandfather must never know about that night at Ponselle's inn, so he must never know that last night, too, she had gone to a room occupied by Richard Lansing.

Trying to keep her fingers steady, she broke the seal and unfolded the note. He had written:

There is a certain passage in *Coriolanus* that I have been unable to find. Are you at all familiar with the play? If so, will you meet me in the library around two this afternoon and help me find it?

He had left the note unsigned.

What a clever scoundrel he was. The library would be an excellent place for a brief private meeting. Her grandfather's failing eyesight had caused him to give up reading years before. The marquise read nothing but fashion periodicals and paper-covered editions of French novels such as those of Prevost, and French translations of Richardson. Ninon de Lentric probably had not opened a book since she was released from the schoolroom. As for the servants, it must be that they entered the small room very early in the morning to dust the table and armchairs and books, because she had never glimpsed one of them there. Yes, the library was a good choice.

Best to meet him there. Best to make it clear as soon as possible that there would be no repetition of last night. She dropped the note onto the counterpane and, hand quite steady now, accepted the cup and saucer Josette held out to her.

She was already in the library, standing beside the shelves with an open book in her hand, when she heard the tall clock out in the corridor strike two. Almost immediately the Englishman came into the room. Swiftly he moved toward her. Before he could speak, she said in a low, cold voice, "I know nothing of *Coriolanus*. What is it?"

"One of Shakespeare's lesser-known plays." He too kept his voice low. "I realized you probably had never heard of it."

"Then why did you ask me here?"

He smiled down at her. "Let us not play games, Angelique. I had to see you again alone, just as soon as possible."

"Why?"

"*Why!* Because I needed to look at you, even though I knew I would not be able to touch you too, not with the damned servants swarming all over the place, and your aunt apt to poke her nose in the doorway any minute. You must have known why I asked you here."

"I only know why I came. I came to tell you that if I can help it, we will not be alone together again, anywhere."

After a long moment he said, "By the time you left my room last night, I thought you had gotten over thinking in that nonsensical fashion."

"Nonsensical!"

"Yes! I can understand why it might take a long time for you to forgive me fully for what happened in the past. In fact, you may never be able to forgive me entirely. But at the same time, you should realize after last night that we have something between us that should not be wasted, something wonderful and rare—"

"Rare! Peasant girls and boys tumbling in haystacks have what we had last night."

"Perhaps some do. But not many. Most people of any sort never achieve what you and I had last night. In spite of all that has happened to you, you are still too young and ignorant to realize that.

"Don't despise the body's wisdom," he went on. "I know that now you probably think that true love, real love, is what that precious ex-priest of yours gave you. And I am not saying that it does not have value, even great value. But what your body learned from mine—what we learned from each other—last night in my bed has value too. It is no common stone to be picked up on any seashore. You may never find it again, with anyone. I suppose you do not believe that, but it is true."

The brown eyes looking deep into hers. The mouth with its full lower lip only inches above her own. Even though he had not touched her, she felt that inward tremor, that softening . . .

She turned from him, closed the book in her hand, and put it back on the shelf. No matter that just his words, just his nearness, could bring her this sense of inward melting. Not only prudence but also self-respect demanded that she have nothing more to do with this despoiler of herself and her family.

She said, "Sir Richard, I think I have made it clear. From now on, to me you are my grandfather's guest, and nothing more. You are not to try to touch me again, or try to see me alone, or talk to me in this fashion. If you do, I shall make you pay for it, somehow."

She saw him stiffen, saw a flush darken his face. After a moment he said, "You need not make absurd threats. Your wishes will be respected."

Gaze fixed straight ahead, she moved past him and out of the library.

Even though the days had grown shorter, many of the evenings were still warm. That night in the dining salon the long windows were still open. A faint breeze, scented with jasmine, bent the candleflames in the tall crystal candelabra set a few feet apart on the highly polished table, so that a wavering glow fell on the dark red roses rising from silver vases, and the gold-rimmed platter holding roast pheasant and truffles, and on the crystal glasses filled with pale yellow wine. The wavering glow played over Sir Richard's smiling dark face as he spoke in a soft voice to the lovely brunette beside him. So far at supper he had conversed with Angelique not at all, except for a polite good evening, and with her grandfather and aunt only as much as etiquette demanded. The rest of his attention had been centered on Ninon. And Ninon was loving it. Faint color touched the perfect cheekbones, and a dimple Angelique had never noticed before played at one corner of her soft mouth.

Suddenly the Englishman looked across the table at Angelique. "Perhaps you can help me. I am trying to quote to Mademoiselle de Lentric a poem by Edmund Waller, but all I can remember is, 'Go, lovely rose, tell her that wastes my time and me . . .' What is the rest of it?"

"I have no idea," Angelique said coldly, although she did know it. While she was learning English under Jacques's tutelage she had read and liked that poem. Early this spring she

had found a French translation of it in her grandfather's library.

"A pity, madame. I mean, mademoiselle," he amended hastily. "But you must forgive me for assuming you thoroughly familiar with both French and English literature. A lady of your formidable intellect . . ."

He let his voice trail off. You bastard, Angelique thought, and mentally added a few choice epithets she had learned in prison. He had the respectful air of a man speaking to a woman of her aunt's generation, or at least years older than the twenty-five-year-old beauty at his side.

Now he had turned to the Duc de Rhoulac, sitting at the head of the table and sipping pale wine. "I must congratulate you yet again on your granddaughter, monsieur. If she were in Paris, she would become known as a second Madame Roland."

The old man almost spluttered into his wine. "I should hope not!" he said, setting the glass down with a sharp click. "Madame Roland indeed! That revolutionary harpy and that so-called salon of hers! Unless they can be stopped, that crew will finally commit regicide. Mark my words! Regicide!"

Richard Lansing said in soothing tones, "I did not mean that Madame de Rhoulac—I mean Mademoiselle—makes one think of Madame Roland as far as politics is concerned. I am sure that your granddaughter is as staunchly royalist as yourself. I meant only that both ladies are of the sort of intellect that daunts a man. But then, I suppose such women are quite self-sufficient, with no need of the attentions of our sex."

But her grandfather, evidently assured that no slur had been intended upon her loyalty to Louis XVI, apparently had stopped listening.

After supper that night Ninon as usual sang for them, to her own accompaniment on the pianoforte. At Richard's insistence, she sang not just the customary two songs, but several. Ninon always appeared at her best during these informal musicales. Her voice was a velvety contralto, and she played very well indeed. Watching the slender white fingers move over the keys—fingers that had never known the touch of dishwater and lye soap, that had never blacked a grate or scrubbed a floor—Angelique for the first time envied the other young woman's musical talent. She also wondered if

Richard soon would turn to her and say something like, "What a pity you are not musical too, mademoiselle. But then, I suppose that a woman of your intellectual accomplishments regards playing and singing love songs as frivolous."

But he said nothing. He contented himself with hovering close to Ninon, turning the pages of her music for her, and smiling whenever she looked up at him.

Angelique began to feel a headache throb at the base of her skull. She waited until Ninon finished her song and let her hands drop from the keys. Then Angelique excused herself and went up to bed.

It went on like that for several days. To Angelique Richard showed the grave courtesy due a middle-aged family connection. With Ninon he was every inch the doting swain, riding with her, listening with an enraptured expression while she played the pianoforte and sang, and giving her low-voiced compliments that made her hang her lovely head and blush. He even spent hours at the card table, and did not appear to mind that Ninon chattered constantly, and seemed unable to remember for more than two minutes at a time what suit had been declared trump.

The marquise could not have been more delighted if Ninon had been her own daughter. Twice that week Angelique saw her aunt give a letter to a footman to post. Angelique would have been willing to bet that the letter had been addressed to the Comte de Lentric, and that it contained such expression as "extremely attentive," and "scarcely strays from her side," and "we may have every hope of hearing happy news soon."

Was Richard seriously interested in Ninon? Certainly such an interest would be understandable. She was not only beautiful, she was very rich.

But Angelique by then had realized that the Englishman, no matter how numerous and great his faults, was a man of humor and intelligence. How could he stand listening to that rattlebrain for even a few days or weeks, let alone for a lifetime?

Well, perhaps after they were married he could stop even pretending to listen. And anyway, for a fortune the size of Ninon's a man might be prepared to endure considerable boredom.

Let him marry her, then! And if she was as insipid in bed as she was at the supper table, it would serve him right.

But the lovely aristocrat might not be insipid in bed. She recalled Richard saying that the bluest blood is often the hottest. And certainly passion did not require intelligence. Quite the opposite. She thought of herself in his arms, helpless and mindless in her need for his driving body. Ninon might be like that. In fact, there was something in the way Ninon had been looking up at him these past few days, lips slightly parted . . .

Angelique thrust the thought aside. It must have lurked below the level of her conscious thought, though, only to surface that night in the form of a dream.

In the dream it was night, and she and Richard were in the rose garden, locked in an embrace. She was aware of his lips warm on hers, aware of his arms holding her close against him, and the growing clamor of her hunger for him.

Then suddenly it was Ninon in his arms, not herself. She herself was somewhere down the path as Richard held the lovely girl, and kissed her lips, and bent to kiss her bare shoulders.

She awoke. Even after the dream had begun to dissolve, her heart still pounded with anger and pain. I must get away from here for a little while, she thought. Perhaps by the time she returned she would have regained control of herself.

As soon as she had finished breakfast the next morning she wrote a note and sent it by a manservant to the de Ponfort château. Since they had asked her to visit them at any time, would they mind if she visited them soon? The reply of the elderly pair was cordial. They would send a coach for her the next morning.

She enjoyed her three days at the de Ponforts', reading aloud to the marquise in the afternoons and in the evenings peering through a telescope, a new acquisition of the marquis', at the moons of Mars and the rings of Saturn. She could not keep her waking thoughts from straying now and then to the Englishman, but at least he stayed out of her dreams.

The de Ponfort coach returned her to the Château de Rhoulac on a bright afternoon of blue late-September sky and of blue lupines at the roadside. When the coach rolled into the courtyard, a groom hurried forward to seize the bridles of the horses. The de Ponfort footman opened the coach door for her and let down the steps.

Almost the minute her foot touched the cobblestones she saw, with a leap of the pulse in the hollow of her throat, that Richard's rangy black hunter no longer stood in its usual stall.

Well, perhaps the horse was back in the rear-courtyard stables. That seemed unlikely, though. Richard's hunter, although well-schooled in other respects, grew restive whenever stabled close to another horse. In fact, he was apt to try to kick down the partition separating himself from his neighbor.

She asked the groom, "Where is Sir Richard's hunter?"

"Why, he has gone, mademoiselle."

"I can see that. But where is he? Is Sir Richard out hunting?"

"No, mademoiselle. As I said, he has gone. Gone back to England."

For a moment she felt weak and dizzy, as if she might faint. Then she saw that the majordomo was hurrying toward her. She managed to say, "Will you see that my trunk is taken up to my room?"

"Of course, Mademoiselle de Rhoulac."

She walked, not toward the broad front steps, but toward the turret at the château's northeastern end. At the moment she did not want to risk encountering her aunt or her grandfather or Ninon, if the girl was still here.

Why had she not realized that he might end his visit during her absence? And why did she feel like this? After all, she had gone to the de Ponforts' to escape the conflicting emotions the very sight of him awoke in her. She should be glad to be free of him.

Why had he gone? To tell the steward of his estate that soon he would be bringing a bride—a rich and beautiful bride—back to England? Perhaps. And perhaps Ninon had returned to her father's château and was already, with the aid of a modiste imported from Paris, deciding upon her trousseau. In that case, Angelique hoped that her aunt had gone there also, to flutter in a motherly fashion about Ninon, and to receive the comte's gratitude, and perhaps, in the end, his proposal. Right now Angelique dreaded her aunt's sharp gaze. In fact, she felt that right now her strange sense of desolation would be obvious even to eyes less acute than her aunt's.

She crossed the château's rear courtyard and went through

the open gate into the garden with its tall yew hedges, its graveled paths, its sundials and reflecting balls set in triangles of late-blooming roses, red and white and pink and yellow. Too late she realized that she should not have come here. This was the setting of her dream, the one that had sent her running to the de Ponforts'. Quickening her steps, she went through an arch in the tall yew hedge that separated the rose garden from the orangery and the herb garden.

Richard was moving toward her along the path between the orange trees in their big wooden tubs.

She stopped short. Then she ran toward him. Later she realized that she might have thrown herself against his chest if he had not reached out, touched her shoulder, and said, "Careful."

Of course. Anyone could be looking down from the château's upper-floor windows into the garden. She said in a low, strained voice, "I thought you had gone back to England."

"Gone back? Who told you that?"

"One of the grooms. I saw your hunter was gone, and I asked if you were out hunting, and he said no, you had gone back to England."

"Darling, darling!" The endearment, the first he had ever given her, shook her like a wind. "You must have misunderstood him. It was the hunter who has gone back to England. He came up lame three days ago—the afternoon of the day you left—and so I sent him in a van to Calais. After he crosses the channel my head groom will know how to treat him."

She said weakly, "Oh." She added, "Is Ninon still here?"

"Yes," he said impatiently, "she is still here." Then: "Will you come to my rooms tonight?"

She had a sense that it was inevitable that she do so, if not tonight, then the next night, or the next.

"Yes."

He said, on an expelled breath. "At eleven. Now, you had better turn around and walk away, and leave me to my fascinated inspection of beebalm, henbane, and all these other plants with their ridiculous names written on sticks beside them."

Then, as she started to turn away: "One more thing."

"Yes?"

"Try to look your usual high-nosed self. Right now it is

written all over you that within a few hours you are going to be in bed with your lover."

Still in the blue satin gown she had worn at supper, she tapped on his door at eleven that night. It opened immediately, and she saw him standing there in dark brown velvet breeches and ruffled white shirt. He drew her into the room. Swiftly he closed the door and took her into his arms. Her own arms went around his neck, one hand pressing the back of his dark head. All of her helpless, pent-up longing these past few days was in her response to that first prolonged kiss.

Arm around her waist, he led her over to the bed. As they stood beside it he undressed her slowly, deliberately, pausing to kiss her shoulders as they emerged from the blue satin, and then her small, high breasts. With expert fingers he undid her petticoat and let it drop, then rolled the drawers of fine lawn down over her hips. When she stood naked in the circle of her fallen garments, he held her close for another kiss.

He released her. Holding to his arm, she stepped out of her fallen garments and took off her slippers.

He had also been undressing. Now he lay beside her, his long body several shades darker than her own. He kissed her, tongue probing her mouth, and then transferred his lips to one pink-tipped breast.

She began to moan. Perhaps in her growing need to feel the weight of him, the thrust of him, she caught at his shoulder, because he raised his head from her breast and said softly, "No, darling. It is to be different this time."

One arm under her shoulders, the other encircling her thighs, he rolled her onto him, so that her startled eyes looked down into his own. He smiled at her, held her face in his two hands to kiss her lips. Then his legs parted her legs. His hands reaching down, fastened gently around her thighs.

He said, "Bring up your legs until you are kneeling."

Fleetinglly she thought of his phrase, "body wisdom." Perhaps it was body wisdom that told her almost instantly what he wanted of her. Kneeling astride him, she lowered herself until her body, moist with desire, encased his hard erectness. Then she closed her eyes and, with hunger driving her, began to raise and lower herself around that hard, warm column. His hands, cupping her breasts, stimulating her hardened and

erect nipples, increased that hunger until she felt almost as much pain as pleasure.

More swiftly now, she strove for the repeated pressure of his hard warmth against that center of desire deep within her. Desperately her body, moving above his, sought for release. At last she began to feel it, that opening up of something deep inside her. And then suddenly she knew she was helpless to bring about her own climax. His hands caught her shoulders as she collapsed forward. She cried softly, "Help me, take me!"

He did, raising and lowering his hips to drive himself hard into her again and again and again, until the delicious shudders of release ran from the core of her down around that thrusting column. She felt the prolonged throb of his own climax. Then his hands lowered her until the upper part of her body rested upon his torso.

After a while he said softly into her ear, "So many women, so many years. I started when I was fourteen, and I am thirty now. It took me all that time to find someone like you."

She moved away from him after a moment and lay on her back, looking up to where the swags of the bed's dark blue canopy met at a rosette in its center. He said, "What are you thinking?"

"I was wishing that you . . ." She broke off. "I was wishing that everything was . . . different."

He was silent for a moment and then said, "Ah, yes. You are wishing that the past had not happened. What we have in bed is not enough for you. You wish that also I was a simon-pure Sir Galahad, rather than a sin-weighted and somewhat battered Sir Lancelot.

"Nevertheless, my girl, my guess is that you will continue to take what you can get, or rather, what we can give each other. And why not? After all, it is only for a little while, not a lifetime. Why should you be overly concerned with my admittedly unadmirable character?"

She could think of all sorts of reasons why she should be concerned, all sorts of reasons why she should not be lying here. But she *was* lying here. And she had a conviction, half ashamed, half defiantly joyful, that this was far from the last time she would be lying in the Englishman's bed.

THE DAYS SHORTENED toward winter, and still Sir Richard Lansing lingered on at the Château de Rhoulac. Was it chiefly, Angelique wondered, because her grandfather, eager for male companionship, kept pleading with him to stay? Was it because he found the autumn climate far more pleasant in this comparatively warm corner of France than in his own foggy island? Was it because he planned eventually to ask for Ninon's slender white hand, and considerable fortune, in marriage?

Or was it because of those nighttime hours he and Angelique spent in his big canopied bed?

She often reflected wryly that his reason could be any one of the four, or all of them. Certainly his passion, like her own, seemed undiminished when their naked bodies joined. On the other hand, he often praised the mild French climate. Too, she could tell that he felt gratified by her grandfather's obvious pleasure in his company, and in the long political discussions they carried on. Angelique often suspected that Richard Lansing's opinions were less staunchly royalist than his host's, that in fact he felt a secret admiration for the intellect and oratorical ability of many of the revolutionary leaders. She certainly knew, from conversations between herself and Richard in the small hours of the mornings, that he felt a certain understanding of the Paris *canaille* among whom she had lived, those Parisians rendered so ferocious by decades of near-starvation that they had done unspeakable things since the fall of the Bastille and might do even more terrible things in the future. But he never let the frail, passionately opinionated old nobleman guess what he felt. To do so might have caused de Rhoulac to suffer a stroke.

As for Ninon, Richard continued to treat her with the galantry that brought color to the girl's ivory cheeks and a

starry look to her lovely gray eyes. In fact, during the daylight hours he spent far more time with her than with Angelique, keeping his borrowed mount close to Ninon's when they rode, walking with her in the garden, and listening with no doubt genuine pleasure as she sang in her rich contralto.

Watching them, Angelique felt an emotion which she had to acknowledge as jealousy, even though she vowed to herself that she would never let him guess that she was jealous.

But one night as they lay side by side in his bed she found she could no longer keep her emotion repressed. She burst out, "You are planning to marry Ninon de Lentric, aren't you?"

"Perhaps, eventually."

"You mean you feel she will always be available to you."

"Perhaps not always, but at least for a while. I know that her father has rejected her suitors as so many brainless fops or fortune hunters. I also know, from a month-long visit at the Château de Lentric two years ago, that the comte would welcome me as a son-in-law."

Her voice shook slightly. "Modest, aren't you?"

"In this case, neither modest nor immodest, but factual. The comte wants her to marry a certain sort of man, a man of her own class who has at least a modicum of intelligence. Perhaps he hopes thereby to have reasonably capable grandsons. Anyway, I received the impression that he felt I met his requirements."

When she did not answer, he went on, "But why should you care whether or not I marry her? You have made it amply clear that the last thing on earth you yourself would want would be to spend a lifetime with a man of my character."

She did not answer that directly. Instead she said, after a long moment, "The way you fawn over her, you had better ask her to marry you."

"I started fawning over her, as you call it, in the hope of arousing some—should I call it competitiveness?—in you. And now, whether or not I ask her to marry me, I feel I must keep being attentive as long as we are both guests here. It would be too humiliating for her otherwise."

He reached out and closed his hand over her right breast. "But if my fawning, as you call it, annoys you for any reason, you can always remind yourself that in a few hours it will be you lying here, not Ninon."

No, not Ninon, she thought. In the first place, unintelligent

as she might be, Ninon would not disobey the code that demanded that a bride of her class be a virgin. In the second place, Richard would not dream of asking her to disobey the code.

But she herself, she reflected wryly, was quite a different matter. No code need restrain him where she was concerned. Half her ancestors had been peasants. She herself had lived caged up for months with women who were the dregs of Paris.

Then she realized her own absurdity. Richard had not forced her to be here. True, their first coming together had been rape, but not their second, or their third, or any of the times since. She had come here tonight and all the other nights because her own willful, desirous body had impelled her to. And so why should she resent the fact that he felt no compunction about taking her into his bed?

When he leaned over and kissed her, her lips stirred in response to his.

It was early in November that she realized with certainty that she was pregnant.

Even though her young body always had been as regular as clockwork, she ignored the first indication that she might be with child. Those months with Jacques had lulled her into the feeling that she was one of those women who conceive with difficulty, if at all. Besides, the emotional conflict she had felt about Richard, and continued to feel, might have caused a temporary irregularity.

But even before she missed the second month, she was sure that she was pregnant. Now she experienced other symptoms, symptoms that had been the subject of overheard conversations during her peasant childhood, and of constant talk among her fellow prisoners in Paris. Her small breasts became visibly larger, as well as tender to the touch. Some mornings even the thought of breakfast made her queasy.

For at least a week after she had acknowledged her condition to herself, she felt too paralyzed to think clearly. Then she began to look for a solution.

One course of action she did not even consider—telling Richard Lansing of her condition and asking him to marry her. By doing so she would only humiliate herself. An aristocrat did not marry a woman like her, a half-peasant girl who had lived with another man, who had been in prison, and

who, moreover, had shared his own bed for more than two months now.

What was more, she reflected, even if by some chance he expressed himself as willing to marry her, she would not want to marry him. After their physical passion cooled, as it inevitably would, what would there be ahead? A lifetime to spend with a man she could never forgive for past suffering he had brought to those she loved and to her.

Then what other courses were open to her? Well, she could appeal to the marquise. True, her aunt had never shown any great affection for this niece so abruptly thrust upon her, but perhaps, for the sake of her frail and elderly father, the marquise would help Angelique now. Perhaps together they could devise some scheme by which the two of them, or Angelique alone, would be able to go away someplace before the pregnancy became obvious. Angelique could stay there, posing as a widow, until the child was born, and then place it, for a fee, with some respectable couple.

There was another alternative. In prison she frequently had heard talk of women in lower-class districts who made their living by ending the unwanted pregnancies of other women. But she shrank even from the thought of seeing such districts again, let alone placing her body in the filthy hands of some crone. Besides, all the time she was in Paris, she would be afraid that she might find herself rearrested and back in prison.

Should she, then, make up her mind to go away in a month or so, have her child, leave it with some couple? Even though she certainly had not wanted to become pregnant, and even though she could know nothing about that child, not even its sex, she felt a twisting pang at the thought of placing it in another woman's arms.

She was still moving through her days, so distressed that she felt a paralyzed inability to do anything at all about her situation, when a modiste arrived from Paris, bringing with her for a final fitting the gowns the marquise had ordered for herself and Angelique many weeks before. Wearing one of the gowns, a dark red velvet cut on the narrow lines that had become the mode, Angelique stood in the winter sunlight slanting through her bedroom window. Her aunt sat a few feet away, watching the modiste as she fussed with the folds of the skirt.

Suddenly the marquise said, "You will have to do something about the bodice. It is so tight that the material seems to be straining at the seams."

The modiste, a thin, high-nosed brunette who looked as if she could hold her own in any company, gave the marquise a cool glance and said, "I am aware of that, madame. Seams must be let out slightly at the sides of the bodice and at the waist too. But that is no fault of mine or of my assistant. Mademoiselle's measurements have changed since I first fitted this gown to her."

Unable to keep from looking at her aunt, Angelique saw the sudden leap of suspicion in the blue eyes a shade lighter than her own. Angelique felt the betraying color flood her face and then drain away.

The modiste said, fingers busy with the buttons along the back of the gown, "I shall take this up to the workroom." She meant the third-floor room which had been assigned to her and her assistant. "It should not take more than an hour to make the adjustments."

The marquise said nothing as the dressmaker, with the red gown over her arm, left the room. Nerves taut, Angelique crossed to the wardrobe, took down a white wool dressing gown, and slipped it on over her chemise and petticoat. It was then that her aunt said, "You are pregnant, aren't you?"

"Yes."

A kind of bitter triumph came into the older woman's eyes. "I warned my father!"

She did not say about what, but of course it was obvious. She had warned him that no good could come of his claiming as a granddaughter his son's by-blow, this girl who had been raised in a peasant's hut.

"When will the child be born?"

"Sometime in June, I think."

"And the father?" A reluctance in her aunt's voice told Angelique that the marquise already was almost certain of the answer to that, and did not like it.

"Richard Lansing."

The marquise's face set in hard lines. Angelique knew she could read her aunt's thoughts. Sir Richard, the woman was thinking, who weeks ago should have gone to the Comte de Lentric to ask for his daughter's hand. Instead he had stayed

here, tumbling his host's half-peasant granddaughter in his bed.

"Have you told Sir Richard?"

"No, not yet."

"I can see why you have not. You know he won't marry you, don't you? For one thing, how can he be sure . . . ?"

She broke off. Angelique said coldly, "The child is his, no matter what doubts you or he or anyone else might have on that point."

"Very well. But even so, surely you will acknowledge that he will not marry you."

"I acknowledge it." Nor do I wish to marry him, she thought, but saw no use in saying it.

"What do you intend to do?"

Angelique said, with an effort, "I had been thinking that you might help me. Perhaps between us we could concoct some story for my grandfather that would enable me to go away for the necessary months. I could have my child, and then . . . then place it with some couple."

"And then come back here," her aunt said sardonically, "as if nothing had happened. Well, perhaps. I would have to think about it before I gave you my cooperation in any such scheme."

Angelique tried to keep her voice even. "Will you assure me of just one thing? Don't tell my grandfather."

"Why? Because you feel quite sure he will disown you?"

"Of course I am afraid of that. But also I am afraid of what the shock would do to him."

"You should have thought of that before you started playing the wanton. However, whether or not I tell my father is also something I will have to think over." She rose and left the room.

Legs shaking, Angelique sank onto a straight chair. How long would her aunt torment her by withholding her answer? Hours? Days?

She willed herself to imagine what the marquise was thinking and feeling. Certainly it would be hard for her to resist the opportunity to say "I told you so" to the old man who had thrust an unwanted niece upon her. What was more, by telling her father, she in all probability would once again become his sole heir.

On the other hand, she was no monster—somewhat cold,

and understandably embittered by the tragedy which had left her to return, a childless widow, to live on the Duc de Rhoulac's bounty, but still, no monster. She would hesitate to deal such a blow to her frail old father. Furthermore, the scandal of his granddaughter's disinheritance, if he did disinherit her, would spread far. It certainly would not help the marquise to achieve her goal of becoming the second Comtesse de Lentric.

The minutes crawled by. The modiste returned with the altered gown, pronounced its fit to be perfect, and returned to the third floor to work on other garments. With fittings over for the day, Angelique put on a dress of yellow wool. At two o'clock, too tense to join the others in the dining salon, she rang for Josette and asked for food to be brought to her upon a tray, only to discover when it arrived that she had no appetite.

Around three, standing at the window of her bedroom, she saw Ninon and Richard ride out through the courtyard gates. Despite the worry crowding her mind, she still felt the twinge of jealousy the sight of them together always brought her. Less than an hour later she saw them return. A few minutes after that she heard light footsteps go down the hall toward the room the brunette girl occupied. Still the marquise did not come to Angelique, nor send her a message.

Then, around four-thirty, someone knocked. She opened the door to see a footman there, the elderly one who had been assigned to Richard as a valet. "Mademoiselle, Monsieur le Duc wishes that you come to the library immediately."

No need to go on wondering what her aunt's decision had been. She had been unable to resist telling her father of Angelique's pregnancy. And to judge by the agitation in Damien's face and voice, the old nobleman's reaction had been volcanic.

Angelique said with stiff lips, "Thank you, Damien." He turned away.

A few minutes later, nerves strung taut, Angelique went down to the library. Her grandfather, white with anger, sat behind a mahogany table inlaid with mother-of-pearl that dated from Louis XIV's time. Near him in a high-backed straight chair sat the marquise. At sight of Angelique she rose and, face expressionless, started toward the doorway.

"Theresel" When his daughter turned around he said, "If

you were concerned enough over this matter to bring it to my attention, then you should be willing to stay here and learn what I shall do about it."

With obvious reluctance the marquise went back to her chair and sat down. He turned his attention to Angelique. "As for you, mademoiselle, you are to stand right there until all four of us are here."

All four of us. So he must have sent for Richard too. Unable to face the pain and rage in her grandfather's eyes, she looked down at the floor. After a moment she heard Richard's footsteps. From the sound she knew that he still wore riding boots.

"Close the door!" her grandfather ordered.

She heard it close, heard the booted footsteps approach. Even though she did not look at him, she knew that Richard was standing three or four feet away.

Her grandfather said, "Sir Richard!" It was the first time she had heard him call the younger man by his title. "Do you know that my granddaughter is with child?"

She heard Richard's swift intake of breath. After a moment he said, "No, monsieur, I did not know."

"Do you intend to deny that you seduced her?"

After a moment Richard answered, in an appreciably cooler tone, "Seduced her? I am not sure that is the appropriate phrase."

The old voice trembled with rage. "Are you trying to say that she seduced *you*, a man ten years her senior?"

"No, monsieur. I meant merely that neither of us planned to seduce the other. It just . . . happened."

"But you admit that you were . . . intimate with my granddaughter, probably more than once, here under my own roof? You admit that you betrayed my hospitality, my friendship, my trust?"

"I had not considered it in that light, monsieur, but now that you point it out, I must admit with shame that the answer has to be yes."

"And you admit that you are responsible for her condition?"

Richard was silent for a moment. Angelique held her breath. Would he say something like, "Oh, as to that, that is quite another matter. How can a man be sure? Perhaps, while she was a houseguest of the de Ponforts . . ."

He might even point out, she thought wretchedly, that both

he and her grandfather knew that she had not been raised by nuns, and that in fact while in Paris she had lived with a man—

Richard's voice broke in on her thoughts. "Yes, monsieur, I accept the responsibility."

"Then you are prepared to marry her?"

Again Richard was silent. And no wonder, Angelique thought. He was attractive, wellborn, and, if not rich, at least possessed of enough money to travel about the world taking his pleasure. He could marry almost anyone—Ninon de Lentric, some rich English aristocrat, anyone. Why should he settle for damaged goods?

But he was the one responsible for her having become damaged goods, that night in Ponselle's inn.

All the old bitterness came flooding back. No matter what the physical attraction he held for her, why had she ever succumbed to it? She cried, "But I don't want to marry him!"

The Duc de Rhoulac thundered, "Be silent!" With obvious difficulty he got to his feet and stood with the knuckles of his heavily veined hands resting on the table. "Well, Sir Richard? You have two courses open to you. You can marry Angelique immediately. Whether you stay married after the child's birth does not matter. You and Angelique, through me, are related. Even though the relationship is very distant, you can have the marriage dissolved upon grounds of consanguinity. With enough money and influence, you can obtain anything. But the important thing is that my great-grandchild be born legitimately.

"So there you have it, Sir Richard. You can marry Angelique immediately, and receive a sizable dowry, fifty thousand pounds in your money.

"That is one alternative. If you refuse it, you and I will meet on the field of honor. And let me assure you, Sir Richard, that I am still an excellent shot."

An excellent shot! Heart twisting with guilt and pain, she saw that his old hands, propped on the ornate table, were shaking as if palsied.

"Very well, monsieur. I shall be more than willing to marry your granddaughter, if she will have me."

Had Richard, too, felt touched and shamed by the sight of those shaking hands? A certain constriction in his voice made

her think he might have. Or was it the fifty thousand pounds which had brought him to his decision?

Her grandfather turned to her, "Well, mademoiselle?"

Command in the old eyes, and anger. But behind that, a pleading. Again her heart twisted. He had claimed her as his beloved son's daughter, and thus rescued her from the kind of drudgery she otherwise might have endured for the rest of her life. How could she refuse him anything?

And anyway, perhaps marriage, even a marriage such as this one, was preferable to surrendering her child to some woman she as yet did not even know. And it was far, far preferable to resorting to some crone in a Paris back street.

Besides, as he had pointed out, the marriage could be dissolved after the child's birth.

"Yes, Grandfather. I will marry him."

His thin shoulders lost their tension. His hands became steadier. He said, "Very well, Angelique. I shall arrange to have the banns waived, so that you may be married as soon as possible. What is more, I will arrange to have the ceremony performed by a bishop of this diocese, rather than the village priest. Now, go to your room."

"May I leave too?"

With a start, Angelique looked at her aunt. She had almost forgotten the other woman's presence. The taut whiteness of the marquise's face showed what she must be feeling. Now there would be no match between Ninon de Lentric and the highly eligible Englishman, that match by means of which she had hoped to gain greater favor with the Comte de Lentric. How she must be wishing now that she had contrived some plan by which her niece could go away and have her child, with the Duc de Rhoulac never the wiser.

"Yes, Therese, you may go."

Not looking at Angelique, the marquise went out of the room.

"Leave us now, Angelique. Sir Richard and I have financial matters to discuss."

Nearly an hour later, restlessly pacing her candlelit bedroom, Angelique heard the rumble of wheels over cobblestones. She paused by a window and looked down into the courtyard, waveringly lit by the flames of torches set at intervals along the coach-shed roof. One of the de Rhoulac coaches had been wheeled to the center of the courtyard. Led

by a groom, two coach horses from the stable at the rear of the château were moving toward the coach. Obviously someone was going on a journey. The marquise? No, her father would demand that she stay here to help prepare for the hasty wedding. Then it must be Ninon who was leaving.

A few minutes later someone knocked on Angelique's door. She opened it to see Ninon in a dark brown traveling costume.

When the brunette girl came in, she said, "Your aunt has told me that you and Sir Richard are to marry." She gave a very bright smile that did not reach her eyes. "I am so happy for you. And I do wish I could stay for the ceremony. But I have been away from my poor papa far too long as it is."

No matter what her intellectual shortcomings, the comte's daughter did not lack courage. Even though her voice was still husky with recently shed tears, she maintained that bright smile.

Angelique said miserably, helplessly, "Ninon—"

"I was not surprised to hear the news," Ninon rushed on, "not surprised at all. All the time Sir Richard was being . . . attentive to me, I kept thinking, why does he not choose to spend more time with Angelique? You are so lovely, and you can talk about books and politics, and you are five years younger than I—"

"Oh, Ninon! I am sure that someday soon you will have just the sort of husband you want. You are beautiful, and you have that lovely, lovely singing voice . . ."

"I know." Still that bright smile. "If gentlemen would be content just to look at me, and to let me sing to them, everything would be all right. But they want to be able to talk to me about things, too. At least, the sort of gentlemen Papa might allow me to marry expect me to talk, and that is where the trouble begins. Well, good-bye, Angelique."

The marriage took place three days later, with the Duc de Rhoulac and his daughter as the only witnesses. The ceremony was performed, not in the village church, but in the de Rhoulac private chapel in the château's southwest turret. When the château had been built two centuries earlier, the de Rhoulacs, like most Frenchmen of all classes, had been pious. But the present Duc de Rhoulac was a true son of the Enlightenment, with only a vague Deism for a religion. The

Church, he felt, brought order and dignity to the great occasions of life—birth and marriage and death—but otherwise had little to offer an educated man. For that reason the little chapel, the one time Angelique had looked into it, had been filled with the dust and cobwebs of many years.

But servants had been busy here. By the morning of the ceremony, the place had been swept and dusted, and the silver candlesticks and chalices polished. The stained-glass windows had been washed, too, so that a little of the gray light outside, transformed to rainbow hues, came through to mingle with the candleglow.

As Angelique knelt beside Richard, and listened to his voice and hers repeating the ancient vows of lifelong fidelity, she found herself wishing for the impossible. Wishing that this marriage was real, and not just a ceremony necessitated by the reckless passion between them. Wishing that the man kneeling beside her was someone with whom she would live until death did them part, rather than only until they dissolved the legal bond after their child's birth. Wishing, above all, that she was different, or that Richard was different, or the past were different, so that their bodily attraction for each other could have been reinforced by tenderness, rather than rendered bittersweet by all that had happened in the past.

Two hours later, her grandfather and aunt came into the courtyard to say farewell. Angelique kissed the marquise's coolly proffered cheek. Then she turned to the old nobleman. She had hoped that somehow in the last few minutes she could convey to him her affection, her gratitude, her shame and regret that she had distressed him. But her throat was so tight that all she could say was, "Grandfather . . ."

He kissed her forehead. "It is all right, Phillipe's child. Just write to me, often. And always remember that whatever the future holds, you and my great-grandchild will always have a home here."

She and Richard got into the coach. It moved down the hill. As it turned to the left on the public road, she looked to her right and saw the humpbacked bridge. She remembered the day when, after her walk to the village to fetch the priest for her dead brother, she had sat on the bank below the bridge and let cool water run over her tired feet.

How long ago that seemed. She thought of that grief-stricken seventeen-year-old sitting there with her wooden

clogs beside her, that girl who never would have dreamed that someday she would ride along the road beside the man whose black horse had leaped the wall that morning—not only beside him but carrying his child within her. Looking back, though, she had a sense that everything which had happened that bleak day had made this day inevitable.

The coach rolled through the village and then onward toward the port of Calais.

27

"THOSE ARE OAST HOUSES," Richard said in the polite voice of an official guide. "Hops are stored in them. A large part of the land here in Kent is given over to hop farming."

Angelique looked out the window of the coach which had met them at Dover, a far more modest vehicle than any of her grandfather's coaches. Beyond the roadside the winter-bare fields stretched away, dotted with round turretlike structures with overhanging roofs. She said in a voice as coolly polite as his own, "How very interesting!"

It had been like that between them ever since that other coach had rolled out of the château courtyard. Long stretches of silence had been broken by brief, stilted exchanges. Anyone observing them would have found it hard to believe that only a few nights ago they had lain in each other's arms.

A good deal of the time during the journey they had been separated. At the two inns where they had stopped between the Château de Rhoulac and Calais, the question of their sharing a room did not arise because there were no rooms available for couples. She had slept in a long room with several other women guests, he in a similar dormitory for men. In Calais, after they boarded an across-channel boat at daylight, she went straight to the cabin set aside for women and children. Despite favorable tides and winds, it was a rough trip across choppy gray water. In early afternoon a

seaman knocked on the cabin door and announced that the ship soon would land. When she went up on deck she was surprised to see that the sun had broken through the clouds, bathing with radiance the white Dover cliffs she had heard of but never before seen.

The Lansing coach was waiting on the dock. The driver was a red-faced man of about thirty in somewhat shabby brown woolen jacket and breeches and boots, a contrast indeed to the de Rhoulac coachmen and footmen in their green-and-gold livery. He touched his whip to his hat in salute and then said something in a dialect so thick that Angelique, even though she realized that the language was English, could recognize only a word here and there. Apparently, though, he had conveyed an apology from someone, probably the housekeeper, because Richard said, "I am sure that Mrs. Dolford has done her best. True, I sent her a message from France, but she could not have received it more than two or three days ago."

They entered the coach and rolled through ancient Dover, with its great Norman castle frowning down upon it from its steep height overlooking town and sea. Then they were out on the Dover Road, following a route which, Angelique knew from her reading, had been used by travelers ever since Caesar's conquering legions landed on England's southeast coast and marched inland.

As they rode past an apple orchard standing bare in the winter sunlight, Angelique said, "Your coachman has a strange accent."

"Wilkes? Both he and my head groom are from the Romney Marsh."

"The what?"

"Romney Marsh. It is to the south of here, between the sea and the great forest that we call the Weald. The Marshmen live by grazing sheep in the spring and summer and smuggling all year around."

After that they rode in silence until Richard made his strained comment about the oast houses.

Angelique wondered if this chill courtesy was to characterize their relationship from now on. Perhaps. She had a feeling that they would be far from the first couple for whom the priest's blessing had signaled, not the beginning of physical passion, but its end. After all, for a man like Richard,

proud and self-willed, a forced marriage could not help but be a galling humiliation.

But he was being well-paid for his humiliation, she reminded herself. A fifty-thousand-pound dowry should go a long way toward salving whatever injuries his dignity had suffered. Certainly, she reflected bitterly, it was far more compensation than she had received for sorrows and humiliations Richard Lansing had brought into her life.

He said, "We are on Lansing land now. That is one of my tenant farms."

She looked at the neat timber-framed farmhouse and its outbuildings set in now-bare fields. "It appears to be in good repair."

"Yes, but I hope to do even more for my tenant farms. If possible, I would like to introduce a new breed of sheep that has done well in other parts of England. On some farms deeper wells should be drilled, and on others the outbuildings need new roofs. And Lansing Court needs to have some dry rot removed. After all, the house is two hundred years old."

She could not resist saying, "Well, you should have sufficient funds for all that now."

His head jerked around. A flush darkened his face. "Before you start calling me a fortune hunter, madame, let me remind you that I did not propose to you. Your hand, shall we say, was forced upon me, rather than bestowed. My alternative was to fight a duel with a palsied old man. Besides . . ."

He broke off. She said, feeling angry color in her own face, "Besides, you could have acquired even more money by marrying Ninon de Lentric."

He had regained his calm. "I did not intend to say that, but since you have said it, all I can answer is that you are quite right. The Comte de Lentric is considerably richer than your grandfather."

For at least twenty minutes they rode in silence through sunlight that now, near the close of the short winter day, cast a ruddy light over the empty fields. Then, as the coach topped a rise, Richard said, "There is Lansing Court."

A few yards ahead a private road, branching off from the one they were on, led down to a sprawling old house. Set in a hollow, it was in shadow now, and yet its rosy red brick gave it a look of sunny warmth. Even Angelique could tell that it was no architectural gem. Obviously additions to it had been

built over the generations, so that its many chimneyed roofline was on several levels. But Angelique liked that. It gave her a sense that the house, like the family who occupied it, was something that had lived and grown and changed over the years.

Again, as when she knelt beside Richard in the de Rhoulac chapel, she felt a stab of longing. She thought of other brides who must have come to this house over its two hundred years. Some of them, surely, had loved their husbands, and been loved by them.

She thrust the thought aside. She herself was not a beloved bride. But that very fact meant that she could not afford energy-draining self pity. She would have decisions to make during the weeks and months ahead. In the meantime, she thought wryly, perhaps it behooved a woman in her condition to be thankful that she was any sort of bride at all.

The coach rolled down the private road, past grazing sheep, and up to a wrought-iron gate in a wall of red brick. It was a low, friendly wall. Probably it had been built, not to exclude human trespassers, but to keep sheep from wandering right up to the house door. Today, no doubt in anticipation of their arrival, the gate stood open.

The coach left them at the foot of a short flight of stone steps and then rolled on around the corner of the house. The steps led up to a heavy oak door, dark with age. Before they reached it the door opened. A dark-haired, pleasant-looking woman of about forty-five stood aside for them to enter. As they stepped over the threshold, Angelique gained an impression of a spacious hall paneled in dark wood, and of a broad staircase sweeping upward.

Richard greeted the woman and then turned to Angelique. "This is Mrs. Dolford, our housekeeper."

The woman curtsied. "Welcome, milady." Then, with another curtsy: "Welcome home, Mr. Richard."

Mr. Richard. So evidently she had been here for some time before Richard had inherited the baronetcy. In fact, something in the friendly ease of the smile they exchanged made Angelique suspect that at some time in the past, perhaps when Richard was a lusty eighteen or twenty and Mrs. Dolford an equally lusty thirty-five or thereabouts, they had been lovers.

Angelique had become aware of several people, obviously

servants, lined up at the foot of the stairs. Now, accompanied by Richard and Mrs. Dolford, she walked over to be introduced. "This is Ellen, our cook," the housekeeper said, "and our housemaids, Daisy and Jenny."

The cook was a plump, graying woman of about fifty. Daisy, with most undaisylike freckles and ginger hair, looked about eighteen. So did Jenny, a rather pretty brunette with rosy cheeks. Both girls curtsied and then broke into inexplicable giggles.

"This is Garner, our head groom," Mrs. Dolford went on, "and Fred and John, our two stableboys."

Garner said something—probably "Welcome, milady"—in the same unintelligible dialect the coachman had used. The two stableboys tugged at their forelocks and looked uneasy, like large dogs who are usually denied entry to the house and so feel they may be punished for being there now.

Richard turned to Angelique. "Mrs. Dolford will show you up to our rooms, my dear." The "my dear," Angelique realized, was for the servants' benefit. "I would like to have a look at the stables."

Angelique followed the housekeeper up the stairs and then along a shadowy corridor. The woman stopped and said, "This is your room. Mr. Richard's room—I mean, Sir Richard's—adjoins it."

Angelique stepped over the threshold. By the last of the daylight coming through the long windows she saw a large, comfortable room with a bed canopied in light blue brocade. Matching draperies hung at the windows. Armchairs covered with a darker blue brocade flanked the small fireplace. On its black marble mantel stood a silver bowl filled with white roses.

"The flowers are from Wilkes's greenhouse," Mrs. Dolford explained.

"Wilkes, the coachman?"

"Yes. He is also the gardener. Is the room to your liking, milady?"

"Very much so." She looked around, taking in details. The dressing table with its flowered silk skirt and its wide mirror, framed in gold leaf with an ornate design that combined cupids, doves and twisting grape vines. A wardrobe of heavy dark wood, its doors carved with some design Angelique could not make out in the fading light.

Mrs. Dolford said, "The wardrobe dates from the time of Queen Elizabeth."

"Did Queen Elizabeth ever stay in this house?" She had heard that England's greatest queen loved to pay long visits to the houses of her richer subjects, some of whom felt obliged to almost bankrupt themselves providing her with entertainment.

Mrs. Dolford laughed. "Oh, dear no. The Lansings have always been a highly respected family, but never a really grand one."

"Nevertheless, it is certainly a large house."

"Yes. Much of it is closed off now. It was in the early sixteen-hundreds that the house began to grow so large. The baronet of that day, another Sir Richard, had fourteen children, eight sons and six daughters. Some of the daughters did not marry, but all of the sons did, and brought their wives home to live."

"It must have been more like living in an anthill than in a house."

Mrs. Dolford laughed. Angelique realized that they were going to like each other.

Taking a box of flints from a skirt pocket, the housekeeper lit a three-armed candelabrum that stood on a small mahogany table at one side of the bed.

"I will have your trunks sent up. Perhaps you would prefer to have your tea brought up here too. You must be tired after your journey."

Tea, that peculiarly English meal she had heard about. "Yes, I would prefer to have it here."

"Very well. Supper will be served at eight, in the dining room. You will find it on the left, opposite the foot of the stairs. Oh, by the way, that door over there"—she nodded toward a door on the opposite side of the room from the fireplace—"is the door to Mr. Richard's room. Well, if there is nothing more you want, I will leave you now."

She spoke as if she found it not in the least odd that Angelique and Richard should be occupying separate rooms. Did that mean merely that Mrs. Dolford was a highly tactful woman? Perhaps. Or perhaps among English aristocrats it was customary for married couples, even newlyweds, to have separate rooms. The English were a cold-blooded race, she had always heard—although if that were true, then Richard

Lansing must be a throwback to some hot-blooded Norman French ancestor.

At supper that night in the dark-paneled dining room, Richard and Angelique were silent when they were alone in the room. At the entrance of Daisy or Jenny, though, he would begin a conversation about the village of Miller Wells three miles away, or about the ancestral portraits on the dining-room walls. The women's portraits, he told her, were of Lansing daughters or of the brides of Lansing men. One of the pictures, that of a young woman in an Elizabethan ruff, with blond hair showing from beneath her pearl-encrusted cap, caught Angelique's particular attention. Although the girl in the portrait was plump-faced, and, after the fashion of Elizabethan times, appeared to have no eyebrows, Angelique felt she could discern a faint resemblance to herself. Could it be that the maiden name of the girl in the portrait had been de Rhoulac? Perhaps she, or rather her father, was the common ancestor who would make it possible to dissolve that marriage contracted only a few days before in the de Rhoulac chapel.

But even if Daisy had not come into the room at that moment, Angelique would not have asked him if it was through that plump Elizabethan girl that they were distant—extremely distant—cousins. She felt too tired, and too dispirited, to think of all the months separating her from the time when the birth of her child would make it unnecessary for them to continue with a marriage neither of them had wanted.

When the meal, an excellent one of roast chicken and a dessert called trifle, was over, Angelique said, "I am very tired. I would like to go to my room."

He got to his feet. "Very well. I expect to be busy for several hours. Ben Frazier, the tenant farmer who acts as my steward whenever I am away, is bringing his accounts for me to see."

Tired as she was, she lay awake until after the little gilt clock beside the vase of roses on the mantel had chimed eleven. Finally she heard familiar footsteps along the hall, and then the opening of a door. For a while she listened to the muffled sound of him moving about in the next room. Then there was silence.

At the château her room had been on the second floor of

one wing, his on the third floor of the other. Now the bed in which he lay was only a few yards from her own. And yet she felt that miles of arctic coldness stretched between them.

28

FOR THE NEXT several weeks Angelique saw very little of Richard. Now that he was back in England, he informed her briefly, he intended to act as his own steward, making the rounds of his tenant farms to confer about needed repairs, the health of livestock, and planting plans for next spring. As a consequence, he was seldom at home during daylight hours.

Here in his own country Richard appeared to her as almost a different person, and not only because he apparently no longer desired her. Here when he rode out on his rangy black hunter, now no longer lame, or one of the other horses from the stable at the rear of the house, it was not to hunt but to make the rounds of his farms. Not once that winter was he one of the pink-coated riders she often saw hurtling across fields and over walls behind a pack of baying hounds. And in the evenings, the man who at the Château de Rhoulac had whiled away the after-supper hours playing piquet or turning pages of music for the lovely Ninon, now often sat in a little room off the entrance hall, frowning over ledgers.

Often he was not there for supper. "Sir Richard left word this morning," Mrs. Dolford would say, "that he is taking supper tonight at the inn in the village with his solicitor." Or with his physician, Dr. Hawkwood. Or with one or another of the neighboring landowners.

On evenings when he was to be home for supper he more often than not arranged ahead of time that there would be at least one other person at table. He would say to Angelique in a coolly courteous voice that he would like for her to send a note asking Dr. Hawkwood to supper "two nights hence," or his second cousin Elizabeth Cantrell, or some other of the lo-

cal gentry who had called since Richard had brought Angelique to Lansing Court. Angelique too was glad to escape the strained silence of their meals alone together, even when the alternative was supping with Dr. Hawkwood, who although only middle-aged was so deaf you had to shout, or with Lord and Lady Fentriss, a pair of elderly religious fanatics who talked throughout the meal of how the Church of England was menaced, not only by Methodists and Quakers, but by Low Church tendencies among its own clergy.

As for Cousin Elizabeth Cantrell, Angelique was always glad of her company. A thin spinster a year or so older than Richard, she was indisputably plain, with sandy hair, a long thin nose, and a wide mouth. Her only good feature was a pair of large gray eyes. But she was such a thoroughly nice person—both intelligent and modest, both humorous and kind—that people soon forgot her plainness. Angelique listened with interest as the two cousins discussed political questions of the day. They agreed upon some things—the need for Poor Law reform, for instance, so that the destitute would no longer be harried from the grudging charity of one village to the equally grudging charity of the next, but instead would be given by authority of Parliament shelter, food, and work according to their capacities. On some topics they disagreed. In her gentle way Elizabeth was a radical. She not only believed that women, even though they were married, should keep control of any money they had inherited. She also believed that someday Englishwomen should and would be able to vote, a notion that made Richard shake his head in wonderment.

One night Richard mentioned that he might stand for Parliament. A remark Angelique could not resist rose to her lips. "In France I had no idea you were interested in anything so serious as politics."

His brown eyes regarded her coolly. "In France the only politics people took any real interest in were their own. And I find French politics barbarous when not frivolous."

"Why, Richard!" Elizabeth's face colored with embarrassment for him. "Have you forgotten that your wife is a Frenchwoman? And as for barbarity," she went on more warmly, "it was an *English* king—one of the Edwards, I think—who shut up a Scottish noblewoman in a small wicker cage and left her hanging outside the Tower of London for

years and years, winter and summer. And the French did not invent placing severed heads on pikes, you know. During our War of the Roses, the walls of the city of York were decorated with such grisly trophies. And during the Cromwellian campaign in Ireland—"

"Here, my dear Liza," Richard said, filling her glass, "cool off with more wine. And if you like, I will admit that a savage lurks somewhere beneath the Englishman's skin too."

The next night was one of the rare occasions when she and Richard took supper alone. Again the meal was one of strained silence, except for their forced conversation whenever Daisy or Jenny was in the room.

Still, she did not find herself too unhappy that winter. For one thing, spring came very early to the sheltered hollow in which Lansing Court stood. By the first week in February the green shoots of daffodils, as well as white and purple and yellow crocuses, were showing in the flowerbeds beneath Lansing Court's ancient front windows. During Angelique's growing-up years she had never been able to indulge her love for flowers. What peasant family could afford to allot effort and growing space to something you could not eat? Sometimes she'd had an impulse to gather roadside wildflowers—yarrow or goldenrod or chicory—and place them in a pewter mug on the table, but she had known that Simon and Marie would look at her with wondering and perhaps even worried eyes.

Here, though, just as at the château with its far grander gardens, she was able to feast her eyes on blossoms every day, not only in the flowerbeds, but in the greenhouse near the stable where Wilkes, the coachman-gardener, worked most mornings the year around. Perhaps because he too loved flowers, and because he too had grown up in a poverty-stricken environment where raising flowers would have seemed a ridiculous activity, she and the Romney Marshman became friends. She came to understand most, if not all, of his dialect, and he seemed to comprehend her French-accented English. Sometimes, unable to resist the feel of silky soil between her fingers, she knelt beside him on a straw mat in the flowerbeds—knelt carefully, because by now her waistline had thickened considerably—and helped him pull up tiny weeds.

She kept busy in other ways too. Each morning she con-

ferred with Mrs. Dolford about menus and other household matters, even though she knew that the housekeeper, who had run Lansing Court alone for many years, was quite capable of deciding whether or not Lord and Lady Fentriss should be served a joint of mutton, or whether Daisy should be given a shilling or a bottle of scent for her birthday. Angelique also took long walks along the public road which intersected the Court's private drive, and read books, mostly of English history, in the small but excellent library, and wrote long letters to her grandfather and her aunt. From the marquise she received polite but brief replies. From the Duc de Rhoulac she received long letters exhorting her to guard her own health and that of his great-grandchild, and going into great detail about the glorious history of the de Rhoulacs, from the time of the First Crusade to the present, so that she would realize the bloodlines that the aforesaid great-grandchild would inherit.

One day as she and Wilkes wandered through the greenhouse, with its rows of soon-to-be-set-out pansies and petunias, she began to ask him about Romney Marsh.

Finally he said, in that dialect she once had found unintelligible, "Then would you like to see it, milady?"

"Very much."

"I could drive you there. Tomorrow, if you like. We should start early, about daybreak, because it is a fairish journey. Four hours there, and then time to rest the horses, and then four hours back."

Before the early-spring sun was fully above the horizon the next day, the Lansing coach had carried her a mile or two along the same road she and Richard had traveled the day they landed at Dover. After a while the coach turned south along a route that led through stands of still-bare oaks, and of maples whose swelling coral buds were strung like beads along the branches. This, she knew, must be the Weald, or wood, that Richard had mentioned. She also knew by now, from her reading, that the Romney Marsh, between the Weald and the sea, had been created nearly seventeen centuries earlier, when the Roman occupiers of Britain had built a defensive sea wall.

Now they were out of the Weald and into what she knew must be the Marsh, a strange world of sky-reflecting water and of low-lying stretches of earth—so low, in fact, that she

could understand why a book in the Lansing Court library had said that it was only by means of embankments and drainage systems that the sea was kept from sweeping in upon the Marsh and its inhabitants.

She saw some of those inhabitants standing immobile in doorways or just outside the huts that dotted the flat stretches of earth which, linked by bridges, rose above cattailed swamps and drainage ditches. As the coach approached each hut, Angelique could almost feel the hostility and suspicion of those dark, motionless figures. Then, when they recognized Wilkes on the box, they would wave or call out a greeting in the Marsh dialect.

When the sun, still almost winter-low in the southern half of the sky, stood about at its zenith, Wilkes stopped the coach. He spread a blanket for her on the brown roadside grass, took down from the box the picnic basket packed the night before, and then handed her out of the coach.

"Wilkes, isn't it about time that the sheep were brought from winter pasturage back to the Marsh?"

"Soon, milady. The wind off the sea is still too strong for them."

"What do the Marsh people do besides graze sheep and grow their own vegetables? What do they do in the winter-time, for instance?"

"Other things, milady."

She smiled inwardly. Both from what Richard had told her and from an outraged editorial in the London weekly to which he subscribed, she knew what the Marshmen did in the winter, and at other times of the year too. Just as they had for centuries, they smuggled. They smuggled tea, tobacco, sugar, and almost everything else that His Majesty George III had taxed heavily for decades in order to support his wars on the Continent and in America.

"I'll take the horses now, milady, back to that house we passed a few minutes ago. A cousin of mine lives there. I can feed and water the horses in his shed."

"And your own dinner, Wilkes?"

"I will share my cousin's."

When he had gone, leading the two heavy-haunched gray coach horses, she opened the picnic basket. Sitting on the blanket, she ate cold roast chicken and cheese and bread. When she had finished her meal, she just sat there watching

the reeds in a nearby marshy patch wave in the wind, and hearing the harsh cries of seabirds. Why was it, she wondered, that only small inland birds—thrushes and warblers and nightingales—sang sweetly?

After a while Wilkes came back with the horses. He hitched them between the traces, placed the now empty picnic basket and the blanket on the box, and handed Angelique into the coach. With some difficulty he backed and turned the vehicle in the narrow road. The rested horses started off at a smart trot.

Something—afterward Wilkes told her it must have been a coney running across their path—made the horses rear and back up. With a jolt, the coach's rear-left wheel ran off the road. She heard a splintering sound, felt the coach tilt.

The coach door opened and Wilkes's alarmed face peered in at her. "Are you all right, milady?"

"Yes, Wilkes."

He disappeared, only to reappear a minute or so later with consternation in his face. "Oh, milady, milady!" Distress made his dialect so thick that she could not understand his next words.

"Please, Wilkes. More slowly."

"Two spokes are broken in the left-rear wheel."

"Is that so disastrous? Can't you fix it?"

"Yes, with the help of my cousin. He surely has some cart-wheel spokes that can be altered to fit. I need only walk back to his place and fetch him and his tools. But it will take two hours, perhaps longer, to get the wheel off, and pry out the broken spokes, and fit the new ones in, and put the wheel back on. And oh, milady! That means we cannot reach Lancing Court until after dark."

"Is that so terrible? What are you afraid of? Highway-men?"

"Oh, no, milady. No highwayman could hope to find a rich traveler in the Marsh, or in the Weald either, at this time of year. And the Dover Road has government patrols now. No, I was thinking of Sir Richard. He may be both frightened and angered by your delay in returning."

She wanted to say: In all probability Sir Richard will never know where I went or when I got back, and if he did know, he would not give a damn. Instead she said, "I will explain everything to him, Wilkes. I am sorry you and your cousin

will have this extra work. But do not concern yourself about me. I brought along a book. I shall actually enjoy an afternoon here in the Marsh."

She waited in the coach until he returned with his cousin, a man as thin and dark as himself. Then, with the blanket over one arm and the book in the other hand—a book on seabirds she had found the previous week in the library—she wandered down the road.

As she crossed a bridge that spanned a marshy stretch, she heard a series of plopping sounds, and turned her head in time to see a giant bullfrog dive from a tussock into the water. She stopped and looked down. Schools of tiny fish darted between the reeds. She wandered on for perhaps an hour, pausing now and then to look in her book and try to decide whether that bird arrowing across her field of vision was a tern or a species of gull. She also tried to identify the few wild plants she saw, but found that in this marshy terrain the only one that looked familiar to her was something that resembled wild sweet peas, not yet in bloom.

At last she spread the blanket at the roadside and just sat there enjoying the sights and sounds of nature—earth and clear blue sky, scent of salt water, lamenting cries of seabirds. Gradually she became aware of a serenity, a sense of timelessness and freedom, that seemed vaguely familiar. When could it have been in her growing-up years or in her tumultuous later life that she had known this feeling? Finally she identified the time. She had felt like this when she was very young, too young even to work, and so instead had been free to wander through the fields and the woods and along the river on summer days, each of which to her young child's perception had seemed a week long.

At last she realized that the sun was nearing the end of its short journey across the sky's southern hemisphere, and that thin clouds were sweeping in from the sea to meet it. She rose, folded her blanket over her arm, and, carrying her book, started back toward where she had left the coach.

After a while she became aware that everything was changing. Sky, water, even the road ahead was taking on a pinkish glow.

The coach rumbled over the arched bridge and stopped beside her. Wilkes quickly descended from the box and opened the coach door.

"Oh, no, Wilkes!" she cried. "We must not leave now. Look! Look what is happening."

After a moment one of his rare smiles lighted his face. "A Romney Marsh sunset is a fine sight, milady. Would you like to climb up on the box? From there you can see it best."

With his aid she climbed up to the high driver's seat. Around her the sky-reflecting ponds and drainage ditches and shallow swamps lay like so many irregularly shaped pieces of stained glass, colored pink and green and blue and gold. After a while she became aware that here and there from iridescent waters an evening mist had begun to rise, amethyst in the sunset light. And above and through all that splendor the seabirds flew, bodies dyed by that same sunset light, voices uttering those cries that were harsh and sad and yet strangely beautiful.

The glow began to fade. The ponds and marshes turned an ashes-of-roses color, then a satiny gray. In the west, above a band of apple green, Venus hung in the darkening sky.

Sighing, she looked down into the coachman's upturned face, almost invisible in the fading light. "Thank you for bringing me here, Wilkes. You may help me down now."

It must have been well past eight o'clock, she realized, by the time the coach rolled through Lansing Court's gate and up to its steps. As she started up the steps the coach rolled on toward the corner of the house.

The door opened before she could reach it. Richard himself stood there, dark against the light from the oil lamps in their wall sconces. He stood aside for her to enter and then said in a thickened voice, "Madame, please come into my study."

She preceded him into the small room where he kept his ledgers. He closed the door and then turned to her. Although his face was taut with anger, he kept his voice discreetly low.

"What do you mean by coming home at this hour?"

"I went to Romney Marsh."

"I know that. Mrs. Dolford told me. But she also told me that you left at daybreak. You should have been back by sunset, if not before."

She explained about the accident and then said, "Why are you so angry? Do you feel I should have told you ahead of time that I was going to the Marsh? How could I? You were

not here yesterday or yesterday evening, at least not while I was still awake."

He ignored that. "I will not have the woman who bears my name out on the public road after dark, with no company except a coachman!"

She blurted before she could stop herself, "Richard! You could not possibly suspect that Wilkes and I . . ." She broke off.

"Madame," he said in an icy voice, "you are manifesting your maternal heritage. Only a peasant could believe that I could possibly be jealous of my coachman."

She saw that he was very angry indeed. Somehow that enabled her to keep calm, despite his slurring reference to her "maternal heritage." She said, "Then why are you so disturbed?"

"I told you! I do not want people to see my wife out on the road unescorted after dark!"

"Since it was after dark, how could anyone have seen me?"

Before he could answer, someone tapped on the door. He turned and opened it.

Mrs. Dolford said, "I came to inquire about supper. Have you eaten all you wish to, Sir Richard? And, milady, will you take supper, or shall I ask the maids to clear?"

"I do not care for anything more," he said in a carefully controlled voice. He walked into the hall and turned to climb the stairs.

"I will have supper," Angelique said. "In fact, I am famished."

She sat in solitary splendor in the candlelit dining salon, consuming roast beef, boiled potatoes, and early spinach from Wilkes's cold frame. She was angry with Richard for that reference to her heritage through her mother. But underneath the anger was an emotion she forbore to analyze, a pleased, almost gleeful triumph.

Twenty-four hours later, again at supper, she did understand that sense of triumph.

They were alone at table that night. As usual on such rare occasions, they carried on a forced conversation when either of the maids was in the room, only to lapse into silence when the green baize door closed shut behind Jenny or Daisy. During one such silence, Angelique glanced at a wide mirror hanging above the heavy mahogany sideboard. In it she could

see Richard's profile. He was gazing at her in a way that caused the pulse in the hollow of her throat to leap.

If he had felt physical estrangement from her because of their enforced marriage, he no longer felt it. He wanted her again. The brooding intensity in his gaze made that plain indeed. She looked away from the mirror and into his face. Quickly he veiled the expression in his eyes.

But she had seen it. And now she knew why she had felt that odd exultation last night. Even though the thought had not emerged into her full consciousness, she had known that, despite his anger, he again desired her. Why her failure to return to Lansing Court before dark should have reawakened his need for her, she did not know. But obviously it had.

Ginger-haired Daisy came in with a tray which held a coffee-pot and two small cups and saucers. She placed the tray beside Angelique and then stood aside while her mistress poured coffee into both cups. Daisy carried one cup to the other end of the table, set it before Richard, and left the room.

They sipped their coffee in silence. At last Angelique asked, "Will you have another cup?"

His voice was curt. "No, thank you."

She got to her feet. "Then I think that I shall go to my room."

He too stood up, and inclining his dark head, wished her a good night.

Hers was not a good night. She was still wide-awake when, sometime after the clock on the mantel chimed eleven, she heard Richard enter the next room. She found herself waiting for a certain sound, the sound of the door between their rooms opening. The door did not open.

But again the next night he took supper at home, his dark gaze veiled, unreadable. The next night and the night after that he took supper with her. She knew then that she had not imagined that look on his face which she had glimpsed a few nights before. Besides, by now the tension between them was an almost palpable thing, constricting their voices whenever they made conversation for Daisy or Jenny's benefit, making Angelique's fingers not quite steady as she lifted her wineglass.

After he had taken one sip of his coffee, he got abruptly to

his feet. He said, "I am going to my study for a few minutes. Then I will come upstairs. Is that agreeable with you?"

His dark eyes, no longer veiled, made his meaning clear. She managed to say, "That is agreeable."

He left the room. After a moment she heard the door to his study open and close. She too left the dining salon and climbed the stairs.

In her room, aware of her racing heartbeats, she undressed quickly, put on a silk nightshift almost the same shade of pale yellow as her hair. Then she sat down at her dressing table, picked up her silver-backed brush from between the two burning candles in their tall silver candlesticks. She looked at her flushed face for a moment. Then she unloosened her hair from the tiny amber combs that held it in place and began to brush it.

She heard his footsteps approaching along the hall. Pulsebeats even faster now, she laid down the brush and got to her feet. He came in without knocking, and then, not taking his eyes from her, reached back and closed the door.

She did not remember moving toward him, but she must have, because they met in the middle of the room and stood with his warm mouth covering hers, her arms around his neck, his hands moving over her shoulders and back and hips, holding her close against him. Through the silk nightshift and his own clothing she could feel the hard warmth of his arousal.

He lifted his mouth from hers and said, "Take off that silly thing." Then, not waiting for her to do so, he pulled the nightshift from her shoulders and let it slide to the floor. Lifting her, he carried her to the bed.

Already feeling that hunger deep within her, she lay with coral nipples erect, hips unconsciously moving, and watched his swift undressing. Then he was beside her, parted mouth on her mouth in a long kiss. After a while his lips left hers, closed around the nipple of her left breast.

Her fingernails bit into his shoulders. "Please! Don't wait. Take me, take me."

At his first thrust she felt herself mounting toward that tension that was torment as well as delight. His body carried her higher and higher. She heard herself moaning. For a second or two that deep inner hunger seemed almost unbearable.

Then, while he throbbed within her, she found her own shuddering relief.

Several minutes later, as they lay side by side, she roused herself from langour to ask, "Why was it . . . ?" She broke off.

His head turned on the pillow so that his eyes, dark in the candlelight, looked directly into hers. "Why was what?"

"You began to want me the evening of the day I went to the Romney Marsh, didn't you?"

He said, after a moment, "That is not exactly accurate."

"Then what is?"

"It would be accurate to say that on that evening I acknowledged to myself that I desired you."

"But why that evening?"

He turned his gaze toward the canopy above them. "I was afraid you might have suffered an accident. I also feared, in spite of what Mrs. Dolford told me, that you had not gone to the Romney Marsh at all."

"Where, then?"

"You left before Mrs. Dolford was up and about. For all I knew, you might have carried at least a hand trunk with you. I thought you might have ordered Wilkes to take you to Dover. I pictured you already in France, perhaps already traveling toward the Château de Rhoulac."

He paused, and then said, "Even though it took me a few days to admit it, I realized then how much I still wanted you."

Still wanted you. Not: still loved you. She felt a pang. Then she realized that she had no reason to expect him to love her, not when she herself felt that past grievances would never allow her to completely love him.

Besides, as Richard had said, desire was not something to be despised, especially a mutual desire such as theirs. At least her husband wanted her. She felt sure that many a young woman of Richard Lansing's class found herself with a husband who had married her only for her dowry, and who bedded her only because there was no other means of obtaining legitimate sons.

She said into the silence, "About our child."

His head turned toward her. "Yes?"

"We must be careful not to injure the child. Strenuous . . .

strenuous lovemaking might do just that. In fact, fairly soon we had best keep to our separate beds."

"How soon?"

She thought of conversations she had heard between older women during her childhood, and between Hortense and Claudette at Ponselle's inn, and even among the women in prison.

"It would be best to . . . to cease relations from about the middle of next month until the child is delivered."

Smiling, he laid his hand on her no longer entirely flat belly. "Well, I suppose I can wait a number of weeks until this one is out of your bed and into its cradle. But right now . . ."

He kissed her. No longer so frenzied, they made long, slow love in the candlelit room. Afterward she fell into the sort of deep, untroubled sleep she had not known for many weeks.

29

THE MONTHS THAT followed were the happiest Angelique had known since her young girlhood. She and Richard lived quietly, seldom entertaining, and then only Dr. Hawkwood or Lord and Lady Fentriss or Richard's Cousin Elizabeth. Mounted sidesaddle on the slowest and most gentle of the Lansing horses, though, she did accompany Richard one day on his round of the tenant farms. His introducing her to his tenants was a belated gesture, one which in the normal course of events he would have made soon after bringing a bride to Lansing Court. But belated or not, she enjoyed that day-long tour of his holdings. While he talked to the farmers about spring plowing, she talked to the farmers' wives about their children, and admired their weaving, and sipped their homemade elderberry wine, and listened gravely to their advice about having a knife under her mattress when she gave birth, so as to "cut the pains."

Observing Richard as he moved about some farmer's yard, often with his hand on his tenant's shoulder, Angelique tried—and failed—to imagine a French aristocrat behaving in this informal fashion with his peasant. Why, Richard's tenants, instead of regarding him with a mixture of fear and awe and hate, seemed actually to like him.

And repeatedly she thought of how different he seemed from the man who had been the Duc de Rhoulac's houseguest for so many weeks. Back then, watching Sir Richard in satin coat and breeches turn a page of music for Ninon de Lentric, who could have imagined that only months later he would stand in a muddy farmyard discussing the virtues of cow manure as opposed to that of horses?

Elizabeth Cantrell became a frequent daytime visitor to Lansing Court. Seated in Angelique's room, or, on windless days, in the grape arbor with its already budding vines at the foot of the garden, the two women would work on a layette of gowns and tiny caps and knit robes. Just as she had been unable to master the pianoforte, Angelique was an incompetent seamstress. With admiration she would watch Elizabeth's needle make swift, precise stitches in fine lawn or linen.

Because she liked the woman so much, Angelique felt a puzzled sadness over Elizabeth's spinsterhood. True, Elizabeth was plain. But she was kind and intelligent and charming. Besides, she knew from Richard that Elizabeth Cantrell's father was rich enough to supply her with an ample dowry.

One day as they sat facing each other in the grape arbor, Angelique ventured, "Elizabeth, have you never thought of marrying?"

Elizabeth flashed a mischievous smile. "I have thought of it earnestly. That is why I have decided to remain single."

Her smile dying, she laid the tiny shirt she was sewing in her lap and looked at Wilkes's herb garden, where basil and sage and rosemary grew in weedless rows.

"I should like children," she said, "but marriage seems too high a price to pay for them—at least marriage as it is in England today, and I suppose almost everywhere else in the world. When a woman marries, she loses all power over her body, whatever money she has, her whole destiny. Her husband can throw her money away on gambling or drink, and she has no redress. Courts have ruled that even though a woman's body is worn out with childbearing and she knows

another pregnancy may kill her, she cannot legally deny her husband what are called his conjugal rights. A man can flaunt his infidelities with impunity, but if a woman slips even once, her husband can turn her out stripped of everything—his financial support, her reputation, even her children."

Even her children. The spring day remained warm, and yet for some reason she could not have named, Angelique felt a chill, as if a cloud had passed over the sun.

Elizabeth smiled at the younger woman. "No, do not feel sorry for me. I pass my days quite contentedly, what with friendships, and books, and my little daubs."

She meant her landscape paintings. Knowing that the work of women painters, with an exception here and there, was considered fit only for hanging on the woman's own walls, she sent her pictures, signed just with her initials, to a shop in London, where they fetched respectable prices.

"When my father dies," she continued, "I alone will have control of my inheritance. I shall live to a ripe old age, knitting blankets for your grandchildren and those of my other friends, and serving up tea and my radical notions to all comers."

In March Richard had ceased to visit Angelique's bed. He continued, though, to take supper with her almost every night. Frequently in the daytime he accompanied her on walks or on airings in the coach. In May, at her request, they went to Romney Marsh, with Wilkes strictly following orders to avoid rough spots in the roads. She found the Marsh greatly changed. Sheep had returned to their summer pasture, and the brilliantly green patches of earth were dotted with the white bodies of ewes and lambs, and the air was filled with their bleating cries.

Wilkes stopped the coach before his cousin's house, and both he and Richard left the coach, made their way through a mass of nibbling sheep, and talked to the cousin on his doorstep. Angelique waited, feeling content, feeling even more strongly than she had last winter that she was a part of all this, of the ewes and their nuzzling offspring, of the slow tides of the sea beyond the Marsh, and of the even slower tides of the seasons.

She looked at Richard. He was laughing at some jest, and even the two Marshmen were smiling. Did Richard ever feel any of what she felt now? Probably not, she thought, aware

of a certain complacency. Perhaps only women felt it, and breeding women at that.

They waited for the sunset, a less spectacular one than she had witnessed on that earlier visit, but still lovely with its softer pinks and golds dyeing the mosaic of land and water. Then they drove back through the long spring twilight. Angelique thought of the night when her after-dark return to Lansing Court had resulted, a few nights later, in his coming to her room. Perhaps Richard was thinking of it too, because he reached over and took her hand in his own. She felt surprise and pleasure, because Richard seldom, except when his passion was aroused, had given her caresses.

In late June, fifteen days after her own twenty-first birthday, her son was born. Exhausted by her long struggle—a struggle aided by both Dr. Hawkwood and a local midwife—to propel her child into the world, she fell asleep.

The birth had occurred in midmorning. When she awoke, the slant of the sunlight through the windows told her that it was early afternoon. Both Dr. Hawkwood and the midwife were gone. The cradle stood to the left of the bed, and Mrs. Dolford, ivory knitting needles clicking, sat in a chair at one end of the cradle.

Angelique said, "Mrs. Dolford . . ."

Smiling, the housekeeper got up, laid her knitting—apparently an infant's cap—on her chair, and bent over the crib. With the child in her arms she turned to the bed and held him out for Angelique's inspection. Wonderingly she looked at the red face with its squeezed-together eyes, the button nose, the wispy dark hair, the waving red fists.

"You can certainly tell he is Richard's son," the housekeeper said. "Look at that hair, and that square chin. And you should have heard him crying about an hour ago. I carried him out into the hall lest he wake you. But anyway, it was not the small sound most young infants make. It was as if he was already bawling out orders to the world."

In some part of her mind not completely taken up by the miraculous creature the woman held out to her, Angelique realized that Mrs. Dolford had said "Richard." Not Sir Richard or even Mr. Richard, but Richard. Without even a twinge of jealousy, Angelique recognized that as further evidence that the housekeeper and the youthful Richard Lansing had once been bedmates.

Mrs. Dolford restored the child to his cradle. "I will tell Sir Richard you are awake now." Perhaps she had been aware of her momentary slip. She smiled at Angelique and left the room.

When Richard came in, he kissed Angelique gently on the lips, then went over to look down into the cradle, then came back and pulled a straight chair close to the bed and sat down.

He said, trying to conceal his bursting pride but not succeeding, "Everyone says he is a fine boy. That is a very strange color he has, though. He looks like an elderly drunkard."

Angelique smiled. "The redness will fade."

He said, with seeming, but only seeming, irrelevance, "I think I really will stand for Parliament." After a moment he added, "When the boy is old enough, you can bring him to the galleries on the days I am to speak."

Again she smiled. "How can you be so sure that you will be elected?"

"Because I shall ask the party to allow me to stand in a safe Whig constituency."

She said, "You mean you do not have to represent the district where you live?"

"No, not according to our system."

"Richard, why this sudden desire to be in government? I should think that you have enough to do running this estate."

"At present that is the case. But later on I shall hire a full-time steward. As for my interest in politics, it is not sudden. It is a family tradition. Why, a Lansing baronet, Sir William Lansing, was a member of the Long Parliament."

She had read about England's civil war of more than a century earlier. "You mean that he was for Oliver Cromwell and against King Charles?"

"Yes. Quite a few of the landed gentry favored Cromwell, especially those with Puritanical leanings." He laughed, and she realized it was sheer high spirits which made him talk so much. "After the restoration, though, poor Sir William had to change his tune to harmonize with that of Charles II's court. My ancestor took a mistress, even though he was almost eighty by then, and instructed his wife—his third wife; he had outlived the first two—to paint her face and have the necklines of her dresses cut four inches lower."

"Do you think," he added, "that you and the boy will be able to travel up to London by fall?"

"Why, of course."

"Then I shall have the town house prepared." Several times these past weeks he had talked of the Lansing house in London's Cavendish Square. "We shall go to London, and I shall sniff the political winds. Perhaps I shall be prime minister someday. And if not I, then that one over there. How would that suit you, Lady Lansing?"

She laughed. "It would suit me. On the other hand, I am content with what I have right now."

30

WITH ELIZABETH CANTRELL as his godmother, the Lansing son and heir was christened in the village church a few Sundays later. He was named Richard, of course, the eighth Richard of his line. Often a howler, he behaved impeccably through the ceremony, not even protesting the outrage of having water sprinkled on him. As his father said, he seemed to sense that he was the most important figure present, and so had best mind his manners.

Angelique had said she was content with what she had. That summer she was more than content. Placed in the care of a nanny, a local young woman named Rose Potts, young Rick seemed to increase in size and good looks almost daily. Her joy in her son seemed to heighten her joy in almost everything—in the flowerbeds she and Wilkes tended, in the horseback rides she and Richard took around the countryside, and in visits from Elizabeth Cantrell, whom Rick soon grew so fond of that he would stretch out his arms to her almost as readily as to Angelique. Even Richard's lovemaking, when he again began to share her bed, seemed to her even more pleasurable, more deeply satisfying, than before their son's birth.

But in contrast to her personal happiness that summer, the news from France was terrible indeed. In April the Assembly had declared war upon Austria, homeland of King Louis's foolish wife, a war which went badly for France almost from the start. When Verdun fell in the late summer, a firebrand Paris orator named Danton asked for "a national upheaval" to defeat the invaders. A horde of bestial cutthroats decided that Danton had given them *carte blanche*. For some reason perhaps not clear even to themselves, they invaded the prisons—not La Fabrique, but others—and also that terrible last refuge of the insane, the diseased, and the aged, the almshouse of La Salpêtrière. For two days they raped and murdered, sparing not even children. Before their frenzy subsided, they had killed more than a thousand of the most helpless people in the city.

As for the king and his family, those who controlled them had given up all pretense that Louis was still the head of government. In August the royal family was transferred to an ancient and gloomy prison called the Temple, where guards held them to a strict timetable, allowing Louis and Marie Antoinette so many minutes for prayer, so many minutes to take meals, so many minutes to walk in the courtyard with their two children. Only a few days after their imprisonment began, a new invention called the guillotine, in its first tryout, sliced off the head of a politician who had run afoul of Danton and Robespierre and others in at least temporary control of the tumultuous Assembly.

But most terrible of all for Angelique was her personal loss, news of which reached her first through a newspaper dispatch from abroad and then in a letter from the de Pontforts, the elderly couple who used to welcome her visits so eagerly. The Duc de Rhoulac and his daughter were dead. A mob had invaded the château, killed Angelique's grandfather and aunt, and burned the château to the ground.

Angelique mourned the old man, the father of that young father of her own whom she had never known. Even though her aunt had never shown her any real affection, she felt sorrow for the marquise too, whose already tragic life had ended so violently.

Their loss, though, made her more aware than ever that she had only two people close to her, her husband and her son. Death had taken all the others, except for her Uncle

Georges and his family. And in times like these, with brigand bands preying on rich and poor alike, she could not be sure that even they still lived.

"I do now know why we were spared," the Marquise de Ponfort's letter ended. "Perhaps the mob just grew tired after it razed your grandfather's château. I know that we should flee abroad, as so many have, but my husband is not well enough to travel, and so I suppose we shall just stay here and keep on hoping that this madness will soon run its course.

"I have one bit of good news for you. We have heard that the beautiful young woman, Mademoiselle de Lentric, whom we once met at your grandfather's château, is alive. So is her father. Apparently their estate has never even been attacked."

The marquise's letter had gone on to say that Angelique's grandfather and aunt had been buried, not in the château's family cemetery, but in the village churchyard. Angelique realized that there could be no question of her visiting the graves, at least not at present. According to newspaper dispatches, her grandfather had been declared posthumously "an enemy of the Revolution," and his money, which he foolishly had kept in a Paris bank, was confiscated by the government. The Duc de Rhoulac's granddaughter, venturing into France, might well find herself under arrest by the Revolutionary Tribunal.

The evening of the day she received the Marquise de Ponfort's letter, Angelique and Richard made a brief presupper visit to the nursery to look at their sleeping son. As they stood on either side of the cradle, she thought of her grandfather's angry words: "Whether you stay married after the child's birth does not matter." The old man had gone on to point out that, aided by money and influence, they could have the marriage dissolved on grounds of consanguinity. Had Richard, since that February night he had first come to her room here at Lansing Court, even thought about the Duc de Rhoulac's words? She knew that she had not until now.

In October, taking nanny Rose Potts with them, they went up to London. After leaving them at the Cavendish Square house, Wilkes was to return to the other servants at Lansing Court. Richard had already arranged for the services of a hired coach and coachman in London, just as he had arranged for the housekeeper at the house in town, Mrs. Pre-witt, to hire a cook and two housemaids.

When the carriage stopped before the house of gray stone, with its below-street areaway railed in wrought iron, and its small porch supported by white wooden pillars, Angelique thought: How narrow it is! Moments later, after Mrs. Prewitt, a dignified-looking gray-haired woman, had opened the door for them, Angelique saw that the entrance hall, with its white staircase spiraling upward, was indeed smaller than that of Lansing Court, and much smaller than the entrance hall of her grandfather's château had been. Then, laughing at herself inwardly, she realized that the hut in which she had lived the first seventeen years of her life with three other persons could have fitted into this hall. How easy it was for human beings to become used to luxury.

From the first she liked the London house, even though it lacked the mellow charm of Lansing Court. Under the direction of Mrs. Prewitt, who had been hired by Richard's father a year before his death, the household functioned smoothly. But the speech of the two cockney housemaids remained a mystery to Angelique, far more so than the Romney Marsh dialect of Wilkes. Unless Richard or Mrs. Prewitt was around to interpret, she communicated with the girls mainly by smiles and gestures.

They had been in London less than a week when friends and acquaintances of Richard's began to leave their calling cards. At supper one night Richard said, "We must set aside a day for an afternoon."

She looked at him as uncomprehendingly as if he too had spoken in cockney.

"We must set aside an afternoon each week to receive callers," he explained. "Such weekly gatherings, if successful, can become a salon, a meeting place where influential people can exchange ideas. Salons are important to a man with political ambitions."

She was dismayed. Sponsored by her grandfather's wealth and great name, she had felt socially acceptable at the château. At Lansing Court there had been few visitors other than tolerant, gentle Elizabeth Cantrell. But how could a peasant-born girl pass muster with a crowd of smart Londoners?

Obviously Richard had read her thoughts. "You will do splendidly," he said. "The men will be content just to look at

you. And the women will accept you because you are French."

Before long she realized that he was right about that. On Tuesday afternoons in the high-ceilinged drawing room, with Angelique dispensing tea at a table and Richard at the side-board pouring glasses of port, she found that there was no reason to be nervous. Men seemed pleased just to beam at her fatuously and make a few remarks about the weather. Women, she realized, scrutinized her dress and manners as well as her face. But if her behavior struck them in any way as gauche or peculiar, obviously they concluded that the reason was her foreignness.

A frequent visitor to the Lansing "afternoons" was Mrs. Barrington, wife of an admiral who frequently was away from home. Soon Angelique realized that thirtyish Mrs. Barrington, not any of the unmarried girls, was *the* reigning beauty of London society. Hers was the drawing room always crowded with floral tributes from men. Hers was the box at the opera and the theater always thronged with men during the intervals between acts. Women tried to copy her gowns and her lilting laugh. Some even tried to copy her perfume, a gardenia scent with a spicy undertone, but since the formula had been made for her by a London chemist sworn to secrecy, none of her would-be imitators succeeded.

The first thing that Angelique noticed about Mrs. Barrington was that she appeared to be an older and far more sophisticated version of Ninon de Lentric. The same shade of hair, so black it had blue highlights. The same perfect features. Despite the fact that Mrs. Barrington, like a lot of smart London women and even men, painted her face, Angelique could tell that her complexion was the same creamy shade as Ninon's.

The second thing Angelique noticed was the way Mrs. Barrington and Richard smiled at each other. Just as she had been sure that Richard and the Lansing Court housekeeper had once been lovers, now she was sure that at some time in the past Richard had been in bed with this beautiful woman, and probably more than once. She tried not to let the idea upset her. After all, Lydia Barrington probably would be far from the only ex-bedmate of Richard's to whom she would be handing teacups this winter.

As the season progressed, she and Richard were seldom

alone except for those nighttime hours when he came to her bed to take her in his arms. Most evenings they either went to a supper, a ball, or a card party, or gave one. Frequently they attended the theater or opera. At least one evening a week Richard went alone to a coffeehouse patronized by prominent Whigs.

One such evening, glad to be quietly at home, Angelique went to the nursery after supper, looked at her sleeping son, exchanged a few words with Rose Potts, and then went to her own room.

Sometime in the night a crashing noise awoke her. After a moment she realized that the sound had come from Richard's room. Swiftly she crossed through the darkness to the connecting door and opened it.

By the light of the candlelabrum on his fireplace mantel she saw that he had overturned a small table. With his coat lying crumpled on a chair, he stood in the center of the room, trying to undo the top button of his ruffled shirt. The room smelled of brandy and of something else which she had not identified.

From downstairs came the muffled boom of the hall clock striking three. She said, "You are home late."

He gave a vague smile. "Whole group went from the coffeehouse to Lydia Barrington's. I went along."

Yes, she thought, and stayed after the others left. She had identified it now, that scent mingling with the brandy fumes. Gardenia, with a spicy undertone.

He was still struggling with his shirt. "Here, let me help you."

She crossed to him, undid the buttons, helped him out of his shirt. On his chest, just below the left shoulder, was a small bruise surrounded by lip rouge. She had a sudden vision of Lydia Barrington and Richard in bed. She pictured the woman leaning over him, bare breasts flattened against his chest, lips sucking at his skin to leave that mark like a brand.

She felt a primitive rage, an almost overwhelming desire to swing her palm against his dark face as hard as she could. An instinctive feminine wisdom restrained her. Best not to challenge him about this one drunken episode, lest there be other episodes when he was quite sober.

In a constricted voice she said, "Good night, Richard," and

returned to her room. She lay awake until long after the thread of light beneath his door had disappeared.

Two nights later she was glad that she had remained silent. When they returned from the opera that evening, he himself removed from her hair the green-dyed ostrich plumes and jeweled pin which held them, removed from her body her narrow, high-waisted dress of green satin, and proceeded to make love to her with, if anything, more painstaking passion than ever before. And with more inventiveness than ever before, too. Twice, with caresses, and teasing lips and tongue, and long deep thrusts within her, he brought her to the point where she was almost pleading for release from that tormented pleasure. Twice he refused, lying motionless for several seconds, dark face smiling down into hers. "No, not yet, my darling." When his plunging body finally did bring her to release, she felt a delight greater than ever before.

Minutes later, as she lay drifting toward sleep in his arms, she wondered if guilt over Lydia Barrington had inspired him tonight. Probably not, she decided. Probably he had been too drunk even to remember that he had strayed into Mrs. Barrington's gardenia-scented bed.

But if Richard had forgotten, Lydia Barrington had not. Watching them at the next Lansing "afternoon," Angelique saw the woman look up at him with soulful eyes. By contrast, his manner to her as he bent over her hand—the gallant but somewhat distant manner of a man greeting a partner in a long-dead love affair—seemed no different than it had been the last Tuesday afternoon. It was a manner that soon sent Lydia moving toward the Lansings' small conservatory on the arm of a handsome young Swede who, partly because he was a kinsman of Marie Antoinette's admirer Count Ferson, was all the rage in London that season.

If Richard went to bed with other women besides Lydia during the months that followed—and sometimes she felt that in the frivolous world of aristocratic London he was almost sure to—at least Angelique did not know about it.

Toward the middle of the long London season Angelique grew tired of parties and balls, of seeing the same faces again and again, and of hearing the same compliments from the same dance partners. But London itself she found a continuing pleasure. Oh, she knew that in the East End of the city there must be streets as dirty and wretched as that Street of

the Baths where she had seen the two whores battle over a drunken National Guardsman. But in this part of London, gutters were clean, brass door handles shone, and window-panes glistened in the tall houses surrounding pleasant green squares. As for the shops along Bond Street, they seemed as fine as any along the Rue St. Honoré in Paris.

On one occasion, though, she found shopping anything but a pleasant experience. Her companion that day was a chatter-box named Lady Winwood. As they were moving along Bond Street, Lady Winwood said, "Oh, my dear! Let us turn at the next corner. There is something I simply must show you."

Lady Winwood led her a few yards down the side street and then stopped. "There, in the window! Isn't it divine? I told Gerald I simply must have it for my birthday, but he can be so tiresome with his talk of economy, economy . . ."

For Angelique the woman's voice seemed to blur and fade. She stared through the jewelry-shop window at the little gold box. The bird on its lid was of carved ivory, not gold-colored metal covered with brilliants. Nevertheless, she had the feeling that this was the same shop in front of which she had stood hungry and desperate that spring day in Paris. It seemed to her that she could almost see that stout French matron at the counter, even though in fact the shop was empty except for a man bent over a ledger at a desk against one wall.

In her memory she again glided into the shop to steal the bracelet, again heard the proprietor's shout, again felt a stranger's hand fasten around her arm. Then it was all flooding back. La Fabrique prison. Berthe. The warden with his red, moist mouth . . .

"Why, my dear!" Lady Winwood said. "You are pale as a ghost."

"Just . . . just a momentary faintness."

Firmly her companion seized her arm. "We shall go into this shop and sit down at the counter."

"No!" Angelique cried.

Lady Winwood gave her a peculiar look. "Perhaps you are right. Tea is what you need. There is a sweet shop up ahead, with tables and chairs. If you buy their little cakes, they will serve you tea."

In the sweet shop, as she sipped the hot tea, her dizziness faded. Once again she was Lady Lansing, wife and mother, a

person almost as far removed from that hungry would-be thief as if the two of them had lived in separate centuries.

In other ways, though, France kept intruding upon her consciousness, as well as that of everyone else. News of growing terror across the channel filled the London papers. In late winter the forces that had been trying to save poor, bungling King Louis's life lost the battle. Influenced by the bloodthirsty Marat, the Assembly voted for the king's death. He was guillotined close to the empty pedestal where, before the mob pulled it down, an equestrian statue of his grandfather had stood.

But no matter what the turmoil in the world at large, she was able to find pleasures, great and small, in her own life. One of the greatest pleasures, of course, was observing young Rick's progress. As the year lengthened, as tulips and daffodils in the public squares gave way to irises and then to roses, Rick advanced from scooting or crawling over the floor to taking his first uncertain steps. Very soon, during his parents' presupper visits to the nursery, he would toddle with gleeful triumph from Rose's arms to Angelique's to Richard's.

By that time most of fashionable London had retired to the country. Even those who lingered on in the city during the week left on Thursday afternoons to go to their own country houses or to someone else's, and did not return until the beginning of the next week. Even Richard frequently went to Lansing Court overnight to confer with his steward. But he felt that he should continue to spend most of his time in London, in hope of getting firm commitments from as many Whig leaders as possible to support his candidacy for the next vacant seat in Parliament.

By late July young Rick had turned fretful. Angelique felt that the summer weather was to blame. Perhaps the weather might be even warmer at Lansing Court, since it was farther south. Nevertheless, Angelique was convinced that the baby would be better off toddling over his own lawn than the railed grassy area in the center of Cavendish Square.

Richard agreed. "Before the end of the month I will take you and Ricky and Rose down there. I will be down to the Court frequently, and you three can stay there until cooler weather."

Four days later Molly Hernshaw came into Angelique's life. Afterward she was to think of how ironic it was that this

destroyer of her growing happiness with Richard should have been, not a predatory beauty like Lydia Barrington, but a plain, stout woman in her late fifties.

Richard came into her room that forenoon while she sat at her small desk writing replies to several invitations. His smile was wide. "Come downstairs and meet our son's nanny!"

She looked at him blankly. "What on earth are you talking about? Rose Potts is Rick's nanny."

"Not any longer! Molly Hernshaw has come to see us. She was my nanny from before I could remember until I was six, and now she is to take charge of our son."

Angelique felt, not just surprise and resentment, but an inexplicable chill of fear. "No, Richard. He loves Rose Potts . . ."

"He will love Molly Hernshaw even more." He gave her one of his rare daytime endearments. "Now, stop arguing, my darling, at least until after you have met her."

Reluctant and alarmed, she accompanied him down to the little room off the drawing room where Richard answered correspondence and sometimes conferred with men he hoped would further his political ambitions. At their entrance a woman in dark gray bombazine rose from her chair. Richard said, "Nanny, this is Lady Lansing."

The woman dropped a deep curtsy. When she straightened she said, "Oh, milady!" Her voice trembled. "Forgive me for saying so, but you are just as beautiful as I always hoped my Mr. Richard's wife would be. And now to think that I am to have the joy of caring for Mr. Richard's son."

Her manner blended modesty—even timidity—with warmth. And yet, for a second or two before the woman went into her curtsy, Angelique had seen shrewd appraisal in the small gray eyes.

Angelique said, "I am sure Sir Richard told you that our son already has a nanny."

"He did, milady. But may I venture to ask how old this girl is?"

"Rose is nineteen."

"Oh, milady! At nineteen I was still an apprentice, so to speak, an assistant to the nanny for the Duke of Marlow's children. I changed nappies and gave baths, but I was far from being in charge. It was not until I was twenty-five that I took full charge of a child. And that child was Mr. Richard."

She gave a tremulous smile. "Perhaps that is why he was dearer to me than any of the children I have cared for since. Perhaps that is why I am so very, very happy now . . ."

She broke off, as if becoming aware for the first time of a certain strain in the atmosphere. "Oh, sir! Is it not all settled? I thought it was."

"Of course it is settled!" Richard put his arm around her thick waist. "Let me take you to the door, nanny. I will send O'Connel for you late this afternoon." O'Connel was the London coachman he had hired. "He will bring you and your boxes back here."

"Oh, God bless you, Mr. Richard." She turned to Angelique. "And God bless you, milady." There was just the faintest gleam of triumph in the woman's eyes.

Angelique inclined her head. "You must excuse me now. I have letters to write."

She was at her desk, not writing, but with the pen in her still-shaking hand, when Richard came into the room a few minutes later. He said, "You could have been more cordial."

She tried to keep her voice calm. "How is it she is free to come to us?"

"It is not because she was dismissed from her last post, if that is what you are thinking! It was just that her charges, twin girls, became old enough to have a governess."

"Richard, I don't like her."

"Like her! You don't even know her. Besides, the important thing is that Rick like her. And he will. Where children are concerned, she is the warmest, most loving . . ." He broke off and then said, "When I was a little boy both my parents appeared to me as distant, disapproving figures. In fact, it was not until a year or two before my mother's death—I was fourteen then—that I began to feel close to her. And my father always seemed to me a forbidding person. But up until I was six, and my parents turned me over to a tutor, I knew that I could depend upon nanny for love, approval, and almost anything else I wanted."

Angelique had an impulse to say: Perhaps that is why so many Englishmen of your class are so arrogant. During your earliest years you were treated like small demigods by women like Molly Hernshaw. Women who knew that the best way to guard against dismissal was to make sure that their young

charges would set up a deafening howl at the very thought of being separated from nanny.

But all she said was, "Please don't bring that woman here."

He stroked her hair. Despite the caress, his voice was firm. "You know I like to please you whenever I can. If our child were a daughter, I might give more weight to your opinions about her care. But we have a son, and you must trust my judgment concerning him, at least in this instance."

He paused and then added, "I will arrange for Rose to go to the inn attached to the stage station in Blunden Street. Tomorrow morning she can take the early stage back to her parents' farm."

About an hour later Rose Potts came to Angelique's room. Arm around the weeping girl, Angelique said, "You can get other positions, a nice, healthy, intelligent girl like you. You can be someone else's nanny, or a housemaid, or . . ."

"I know, milady, I know."

"I have some money in my desk. It will help you and your parents out until—"

"Oh, no, milady! Sir Richard gave me money. It is not money I want. It is . . ." A fresh burst of tears. "Oh, milady! I love your little son so. It is pain to part from him years before I'd expected to."

Patting the girl's shoulder, Angelique thought grimly: If ever my world turns upside down again, and I have to work for a living, pray God I do not become a nanny. How terrible to know always that for small reason, or no reason at all, you could be parted from a little child you had come to love.

Late in the afternoon, standing at the window of her room, she saw a swollen-faced Rose get into the coach driven by O'Connel. About an hour later, from the same window, she watched Molly Hernshaw arrive in the same coach.

Some minutes later Richard knocked on her door and then opened it. Beside him stood Molly Hernshaw, already in cap and apron. He said, smiling, "We have planned a little demonstration for you. May we come in?"

"Of course."

He and the woman came into the room. "One of the maids will bring Rick here in a moment . . . Oh, there they are now."

In the doorway the housemaid released the little boy's hand. Smile wide and gleeful, he crossed the room at a stum-

bling run and seized his mother's skirt with both hands. She laid her palm caressingly on the dark curls.

She heard Richard say softly to Molly Hernshaw, "Now."

The woman said, "With your permission, milady," and sank into a chair. Then she extended her hands. "Rick," she called softly. "Ricky, my love."

The child turned toward her. "Come to nanny, darling. Come to nanny, Rick."

With a puzzled air the little boy gazed around him, as if expecting to see Rose.

"No, Rick," the soft, coaxing voice went on, "I am your nanny now. Come to nanny, Rick."

As if suddenly making up his mind about her, he gave a gleeful laugh and toddled toward those outstretched hands. She swept him up against her ample bosom. Over the dark curls her bland gray eyes briefly met Angelique's blue ones. Then she crooned, "What a fine young gentleman he is, what a fine one!" Her gaze went to Richard, then back to Angelique. "Shall I take him to the nursery now, milady, Mr. Richard?"

He smiled. "Yes. Off with you both."

A moment after the door had closed behind the woman and child, Richard said, "Now, do you see how wrong you were?"

She said, "Please! Please send her away. I don't like her."

He said angrily, "Then that merely proves how bad a judge of character you are. Did you see how our son took to her? Children have an infallible instinct in these matters."

Oh no, they don't, she wanted to say. She recalled a road mender in the Château de Rhoulac district, a gentle-voiced, smiling man who from his scanty wages bought sweets to give to small boys and girls. He was beloved by all the local peasantry, both grown-ups and children—until the day the bodies of two long-missing little girls were dug up from beside his hut.

But if she had said that, he might have asked, with that arrogance he could summon up at will, how she could make any comparison between the life of French peasantry and the English aristocracy, or between an insane road mender and a woman like Molly Hernshaw, who had been a respected and valued upper servant in some of the finest households in England.

And so all she said was, "Please, Richard. Indulge me in this. Send her away."

"Angelique, I have lost all patience with you. Molly Hernshaw stays. We are lucky to have her. Now, I will hear no more about it."

He strode toward the door that connected their two rooms. To her dismay Angelique heard herself cry, "He is my child, you arrogant bully, just as much as he is yours. More so! I suffered to give birth to him."

He turned around. "Madam, this is no time for a biology lesson, even if I felt myself in need of one. True, he is your son as well as mine. But his upbringing and education are my right and my responsibility. And until you and my poor misguided Cousin Elizabeth manage to change the laws of England, that is the way matters will remain."

He went into his room, closing the door none too gently behind him.

31

BEFORE NOON FOUR days later the Lansing coach arrived, with Wilkes on the box, to take Angelique and Molly Hernshaw and the little boy back to the country. At curbside Richard kissed Angelique's cheek briefly, touched his son's hair, and smiled at Molly Hernshaw. The carriage rolled away. It took all of Angelique's willpower not to look back to see if Richard still stood at the curb, gaze following the coach.

The last few days and nights had been miserable for her, especially the night. Despite their imminent parting, Richard had not entered her room again after their last angry exchange over Molly Hernshaw.

Sitting on the opposite seat beside Rick, the woman said, "A fine day for our journey, is it not, milady?"

Angelique glanced at the woman's face and then turned

her eyes toward the wide London sidewalk, where well-dressed men and women moved along through the late-summer sunlight. "Yes, it is lovely."

For a while they kept up a forced conversation, but Angelique knew that neither of them was deceived. They simply did not like each other. At last the coach was filled with a silence broken only by Molly Hernshaw's voice saying, "Oh, see the stagecoach, Rick," and, later on, "See the cows, Rick, see the horses."

When the strained journey was over, and Mrs. Dolford opened the door of Lansing Court to them, Angelique felt like weeping at sight of the housekeeper's friendly face. With the now-sleepy Rick in her arms, the new nanny followed Angelique up to the nursery. Then Angelique went to her own room, that pleasant room which for her was filled not only with sunset light but also with memories of Richard.

When Wilkes and the stableboys had brought all three of her trunks upstairs, Mrs. Dolford came in to help her unpack. Daisy and Jenny, she said, were busy helping cook with supper preparations. For several minutes the women worked in silence, carrying clothes from the trunks to the wardrobe and to bureau drawers. Then Angelique said, "About the new nanny. She was Sir Richard's nanny when he was a little boy."

"I know. Rose Potts walked over from her parents' farm the other day. She told us how it was she happened to . . . come home from London."

"Does Rose have another position?"

"Oh, yes. She has gone to Canterbury to be a housemaid for a cousin of Dr. Hawkwood. She could have gone to work within a mile of the Potts farm. Sir Arthur and Lady Dalton offered her a post as nanny to their three-month-old daughter. Rose said that from now on she would rather work as a housemaid."

Mrs. Dolford waited. When Angelique kept silent, the housekeeper hung a cloth-of-gold cape in the wardrobe and said, "How lovely! New, is it not?"

"Yes. A Bond Street modiste made it for me."

What a nice woman, Angelique thought. Although Mrs. Dolford was always ready to lend a sympathetic ear, she never asked prying questions.

Angelique had expected Richard to come to Lansing Court

the following Thursday. He did not. Instead a brief letter arrived, saying that "certain matters" would keep him in London.

He did travel down to Lansing Court the following Thursday. What was more, he came to her room that night. She was starved for his lovemaking, but despite his skillful wooing of her—his mouth warm on her mouth, and on her throat and breasts, and her belly, and her inner thighs—she could not respond to him as she had in the past. It was as if their differences over the Hernshaw woman had brought a blight into the room. When he finally left her to go to his own bed, Angelique sensed his disappointment and irritation.

He spent much of the next day with Rick and the new nanny, riding with them in a cart drawn by two ponies, and later rolling a large ball between the three of them on the front lawn. Pleading a headache, Angelique kept to her room. She feared that Richard attributed her behavior to jealous sulkiness. But it was much more than that. She could not shake a feeling that the woman was evil, and somehow, sooner or later, would bring disaster to herself and Richard. As she watched from behind a window curtain the three figures down on the lawn in the late-afternoon sunlight, she even had a fancy that the woman's shadow on the grass was not only bulkier but blacker than that cast by the tall man and the laughing little boy.

She did not want Richard to guess such thoughts, lest he consider her . . . well, queer in the head. After all, Ricky adored the woman so much so that he seemed to have forgotten all about Rose Potts. Mrs. Dolford appeared to be a trifle reserved with the new nanny, but that might be attributed to a natural rivalry between two upper servants. Certainly Daisy and Jenny seemed impressed by Molly Hernshaw's accounts of life in the households of the Duke of This and the Earl of That. As for the cook, Angelique had glimpsed the trays she sent up to the nursery. She had never supplied Rose with such sumptuous fare as Scotch eggs, roast wildfowl, and gooseberry fool.

All that Angelique could really complain of was a fleeting expression of slyness she saw, or thought she saw, in the woman's eyes—that, and Molly Hernshaw's way of coming up behind one silently, despite her stout figure. Several times a sudden feeling had made Angelique turn around to find the woman near her, ready to make some request or suggestion

in that deferential, almost timid way of hers. Angelique could not talk to Richard about that. How could you complain of a woman merely because she was light on her feet?

For the next few weeks Richard came down to Lansing Court only intermittently. Twice he brought a man with him, an influential Whig M.P., and sat up with the man until after Angelique, sorrowfully sure that Richard would not visit her room that night, fell asleep.

But once more during those weeks he did make love to her. And once again her response was inadequate, so much so that this time he asked, "Angelique, what is the matter with you?"

"I do not know." She wanted to add: But I think it is my fear and anger that keep me from feeling what I need to feel. I am afraid of that woman, and I am angry with you for foisting her upon me and upon my son. But to say that would only arouse his own anger.

Finally he said, "Well, do not distress yourself about it."

She felt her hands turn cold. It seemed to her that there had been something far more ominous than disappointment or irritation in his voice. There had been a kind of detachment, as if, during these weeks spent mostly apart from her, he had discovered that he no longer felt a compelling physical need for her.

After a few minutes he went to his own bed. From then on, even when he did travel down to Lansing Court, he did not cross the threshold of her room.

Had he, she wondered wretchedly, turned to other women? Almost certainly he had.

Despite the tormenting thought that Richard might never again share her bed, she tried to get as much happiness as she could out of life. She tried to enjoy her hours in the nursery and on the lawn with her little son, even though she was constantly aware of Molly Hernshaw's hovering presence. She tried to enjoy gardening with Wilkes, and browsing through the library shelves, and talking quietly with Elizabeth Cantrell.

Even here in the countryside, news of the bloody events in her native land kept reaching her. Her London friend and frequent shopping companion, Lady Winwood, said in a letter:

Have you heard the latest from France? The Assembly, or Convention, or whatever they call that Parliament of theirs now, was invaded by a mob last September 5. The mob ordered the deputies, or whatever they are called, to make a house-to-house search for spies. What spies? My dear, I have no idea, but I think it had something to do with their latest military defeats. So typically French. They are so vainglorious that they feel they could not possibly be defeated, and so whenever they do lose, they believe they must have been betrayed from within. No, my dear Angelique, I have not forgotten you are French. I am sure you realize that I speak of the lower classes, not of the wellborn like yourself.

The wellborn. Thinking of that one-room-and-a-loft hut, Angelique smiled wryly. But the letter's next lines made her smile die.

Literally thousands have been thrown into prison. Heaven knows what will become of them. The rumors are that many of them may be executed by that dreadful new machine, the guillotine.

A few days after she had received that letter, more news of her tormented country reached her. Dr. Hawkwood stopped by with a London newspaper he had just received through the post. It announced that on October 16 a cart had carried Marie Antoinette through the frenzied Paris crowd, a crowd so large and disorderly it took thirty thousand soldiers to hold it at bay. Then she had climbed the steps to her death on the guillotine.

The paper carried a drawing of Marie Antoinette in the death cart. The artist, a fervent enemy of the royal family, had made his sketch with obvious hate. The woman who rode on the rough plank with hands bound behind her was no longer beautiful in his drawing, but prematurely aged, her hair straggling, her features hatchet-sharp. And yet the artist, just because he *was* an artist, had been unable to disguise the dignity with which she had ridden through that howling mob. Angelique knew only too well what want the poor had suffered while Marie Antoinette spent fortunes on jewelry and that elaborate playhouse called the Little Trianon. And yet, looking at that picture, she could not help feeling glad that

the vain, silly Austrian, at the hour of her death, had become truly queenlike.

One early afternoon less than a week later she was about to descend the stairs to the ground floor when she heard the front-door knocker strike. While Mrs. Dolford moved along the entrance hall toward the door, Angelique waited on the landing to see who the caller was.

A moment after the housekeeper opened the door, Angelique heard someone say, "Would it be possible to see Lady Lansing?"

Her heart leaped. That voice! Could it possibly be . . . ?

She hurried down the stairs. Mrs. Dolford was saying, "If you will wait in the hall, I will see if her ladyship is at home." She opened the door wide.

"Jacques!" Angelique cried. "Oh, Jacques. Come in!"

He stood there for a second longer. She saw that he was thinner, older. But he was the same Jacques, with the same serious, handsome face and waving dark hair and intelligent blue eyes.

When he had crossed the threshold, Angelique said, "Mrs. Dolford, this is an old friend, Monsieur . . . I mean, Mr. Latour." Despite her still-racing heart, she managed to speak in a more restrained manner than she had seconds before. "Mrs. Dolford is our housekeeper, Jacques."

Smiling, the woman curtsied and then asked, "Is there anything you require, milady?"

"Nothing at the moment, thank you."

"Then if you will excuse me," the housekeeper said, and walked back toward the stairs that led down to the kitchen.

Angelique caught Jacques's hand. "Come in here."

She led him into the library. A few steps beyond the door they had left partly open she turned and faced him, lips trembling, eyes filling with tears. Memory was flooding through her. That big, airy room atop the moldering house on the Left Bank. Learning to read and write. Lying beside him at night.

"Oh, Jacques, Jacques!" She went into his arms and began to cry against his shoulder. He held her close, one hand stroking her hair.

At last he said, "What is it, Angelique? Why do you weep, my darling?"

She stepped back from him, took a handkerchief from the

lace cuff of her dress, and dried her eyes. She said, with a shaky smile, "I was crying with the joy of having you here."

She realized that that was only partly true. She had wept, not only with gladness at seeing the man who had loved and protected her for nearly a year in Paris. She also wept because of her present loneliness and anxiety.

She said, "How long have you been in England?"

"More than a year."

"More than a year! And before that . . . No, wait." She had realized that it would be best to make sure they were not overheard. A Frenchman in flight from the bloodthirsty men now ruling France might have certain secrets, secrets that must not be allowed to reach the ears of possible French agents in England. "We will go out to the garden."

Through a rear door they emerged onto a flagstone terrace, descended steps, and walked along a graveled path between beds of still-blooming dahlias and marigolds, and the first autumn crocuses and chrysanthemums. They stopped at the grape arbor at the foot of the garden, near the tall yew hedge. Then they sat facing each other, in full view of anyone watching from a rear window but out of earshot of any would-be eavesdropper.

She said, "So you have been here more than a year. Did you know all that time that I too was in England?"

"Yes. After I left France I kept in touch with others still there, including my old employer, St. Isidore's village intendant. He wrote to me of the Duc de Rhoulac acknowledging you as his granddaughter and heir, and later of your marriage to Richard Lansing."

His voice had a constricted sound. How shocked and bewildered he must have felt when he heard that she had married that Englishman she had told him about, the one who with a careless shove of his hand had sent Claude to his death, the one who had raped her in a room of that Montmartre tavern.

She said painfully, "I know how it must seem—"

"Don't, Angelique. Don't feel you must explain, if you would rather not."

She found she would much rather not. How could she explain it to this gentle man who had loved her, even though he had believed her to be a woman of almost no physical passion? How could she talk to Jacques, of all people, about the

passion for Richard that had ruled her like a drug, and still ruled her?

She said, looking down at her clasped hands, "Thank you, Jacques." Then, raising her gaze to his face: "Why did it take you so long to come to see me?"

"I did see you twice, in London, although you did not see me. I read in the paper that Sir Richard and Lady Lansing of Cavendish Square were to attend the opening of the opera. I was among the crowd watching the carriages roll up to Covent Garden that night. You wore a blue velvet cloak with a fur hood, and you looked . . . happy. Another time I saw you and your husband coming out of a shop on Bond Street. Again you looked happy. I decided that it was best that I stay out of your life."

"What made you . . . ?"

"Change my mind? I had not seen your name in the papers so far this fall. What was more, even though I learned from the Cavendish Square lamplighter which house belonged to Sir Richard, and took to walking past it several times each week, I did not see you. Twice I saw your husband coming out of your house, but not you. I began to fear you were ill. Finally I could not stand it anymore. I went to your Cavendish Square house one day after I had seen your husband leave. A woman—the housekeeper, I suppose—told me you were at your country house near the village of Miller Wells in Kent. Early this morning I hired a horse—he is tethered to the hitching post outside your gate—and rode down here.

"You see," he concluded, "I had to find out if something had happened to you."

After a long moment she said, "Something has happened. My husband and I are estranged. It all came about over the hiring of a nanny. Isn't it strange that a servant could cause such a breach between husband and wife?"

But even as she spoke, she knew it was not just their clash over Molly Hernshaw that had caused their estrangement. Surely in Richard, as in herself, that quarrel had stirred up old and never resolved bitternesses.

Jacques said, "A nanny? Then you have a child?"

"A son." She smiled. "We will go up to the nursery and see him soon."

He hesitated, and then asked, "Has this estrangement made you . . . wretched?"

"Yes, but not unbearably so. There are good things in my life. I have my little boy, and this beautiful place in which to live, and books, and a good woman friend, a cousin of Richard's."

She thought: And also I have hope, the hope that Richard will turn back to me again. And when he does, this time I will not fail him, or myself. This time I will respond to him as completely as I ever did.

She said, "Jacques, where were you between the time you left Paris and the time you came to England?"

"In the Netherlands. How about you? The intendant's letter did not go into details about how long you had been back in the district. Did you go from Paris straight back to St. Isidore?"

She realized then that he could know nothing of those terrible months she had spent after he left Paris. He knew nothing of her arrest or imprisonment. She would not tell him about it. That was one thing she could do for him, spare him the pain and guilt of knowing what had happened to her after he left.

She said, "Yes, I went back to St. Isidore." She paused and then asked, "Do you plan to stay in England?"

"No. Shortly I shall return to France."

"France! But, Jacques, that would be dangerous."

His smile was wry. "Not too much so, now. Many of the men who plotted my arrest are now in prison themselves, and a few have already gone to the guillotine. Besides, with France in its present turmoil, the return of a former exile will not be noticed, not if I do nothing to bring attention to myself."

"But why do you want to go back there?"

"Because France is my country, Angelique. I am sure that there are even more terrible times ahead for her. After this present bloody madness has run its course, there will still be a very bad time ahead."

"What sort of bad time?"

"I am not sure. But almost certainly there will be a reaction against the present regime, a reaction whose leaders may cause as much suffering as the men now in power. But after that . . . well, perhaps after that there will be at least just a chance for France to become the sort of country men like me hoped it would."

He paused and then said, "Liberty, fraternity, equality." His voice held a sardonic note as he repeated that slogan which had been on everyone's lips in the heady days after the Bastille's fall. "Perhaps the realization of that slogan is completely impossible. Perhaps men do not even want liberty. Perhaps they always secretly yearn to be ruled by an iron hand, whether of a Louis XIV or a Robespierre. As for fraternity, perhaps men find it hard enough to love most of their own kin, let alone people of another class, or religion, or nationality, or color. And as for equality, even equality before the law . . . well, maybe that will always boil down to the right of the rich as well as the poor to eat grass at the roadside."

He smiled. "Just the same, I am going back there and do my best to make that perhaps foolish slogan a reality. I have given up far too much of my life to that cause to desert it now."

A silence settled down. Then she said, "But you will at least have supper with me, and spend the night at Lansing Court."

He shook his head. "I have already engaged a room at the inn in your village. You see, I suspected that you and your husband might be having . . . difficulties. I certainly do not want to do anything that might add to them."

Again he smiled. "Well, shall we go to see that son of yours?"

They went up to the third-floor nursery. Molly Hernshaw opened the door a second or so after Angelique had tapped on it lightly. She raised a finger to her lips and said, with that occasional coyness which Angelique found most irritating, "We are having our naptime. Mummy would not want to disturb us, would she?"

Angelique's voice was cool as well as low. "We wanted merely to look at him. Nanny, this is an old friend of mine, Mr. Latour."

Eyes modestly cast down, the woman curtsied. "Now, milady, and you, sir, if you will follow me . . ."

She led them across a floor strewn with toys and then into an adjoining room. Ricky lay in his small bed with its wooden railing, curls dark against the pillow, eyes closed, olive-toned skin faintly flushed.

Molly Hernshaw whispered, "Did you ever see a more beautiful boy, sir? Is he not a love?"

Jacques nodded. His face as he gazed down at the sleeping child held a blend of tenderness and wistfulness.

Moments later they left the nursery. As they moved toward the stairs Jacques said, "I had best go to the inn in the village now." Then he added, "I would have preferred that your son look like you. But he really is a handsome child."

She murmured a thank-you.

They descended the stairs and went across the front porch to the walk. Even though she knew that they were visible from many windows, including the nursery's, she accompanied him up the walk. He said, "That nanny. You opposed her being hired?"

Angelique nodded.

"I don't wonder. She has a fawning quality. That is all right in a spaniel, but false and repellent in a human being."

She was glad of his words. Lately she had begun to wonder if her continued distaste for Molly Hernshaw was caused by jealousy. Certainly her son seemed more and more attached to his nanny. Several times of late Angelique had been unable to coax him from Molly Hernshaw's arms until the older woman had said, in a tone of mild disapproval, "Now, love, go to your mummy."

They had reached the hired horse, a bay with one white stocking. He untethered it from the hitching post. When he had swung into the saddle she asked, "Will I see you again before you return to London?"

"No, I must start back early in the morning. I have matters to attend to. You see, I do not want to cross the channel on the regular packet under my own name. That would be courting trouble, and so I must find another way."

Probably, she reflected, he intended to have himself rowed ashore in France from some merchant ship.

He said, "May I write to you from France, so that you will know where I am? Or might that cause further trouble between your husband and yourself?"

She had a bitter impulse to say: I doubt that he would ever know, let alone care, that you wrote to me. Instead she said, "Please write. It will not cause trouble."

He looked down at her, lips smiling but dark blue eyes

grave. "If ever you need me, please send for me. If I am alive, I will come to you. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I know that."

She watched him ride up the Lansing Court drive to where it joined the public road. Then she turned and walked slowly back to the house.

32

EARLY IN NOVEMBER a killing frost shriveled and blackened the dahlias and marigolds and even the hardy chrysanthemums. The fact that the weather turned sunny and mild again the very next day only made the ruined garden look more depressing. Angelique was glad when Wilkes had cleared the blackened mess away, leaving bare earth.

Richard came down from London every ten days or so. When at Lansing Court, he spent all of each night in his own room. His days he spent touring the tenant farms, or closeted with his steward in the small room off the entrance hall, or in the pony cart with his son and Molly Hernshaw. Sometimes Angelique wondered if the only real reason he came down from London was to make sure his son did not forget him.

At Christmastime he spent three days at Lansing Court. On Christmas afternoon in the library he distributed presents to the servants—cameo brooches to Mrs. Dolford and Molly Hernshaw, a pipe and a copper can filled with Virginia tobacco to Wilkes, a silk parasol to the cook, bottles of scent to the housemaids, and pocket knives to the stableboys. His present to Angelique, a string of pearls, was already around her neck. His present to his son, a magnificent rocking horse, already stood in the nursery.

He took Angelique to a neighborhood party given by Lord and Lady Fentriss the next night, and treated her with proper warmth and courtesy while they were there. But in the coach on the way home they exchanged only a few words, and as

soon as they reached the house he went to his own room. The next morning he left for London before she was up.

That late winter and early spring she began to entertain new and more frightening speculations about the sort of feminine company he kept in London. She had assumed that he had turned to such practiced adulteresses as Lydia Barrington. But now she wondered if he had formed some more serious attachment. Perhaps there was even someone he would like to marry, perhaps some girl who had entered society this season or the season before . . .

With a chill settling around her heart, she thought of what her grandfather had said about the possible dissolution of her marriage. Then, with grim desperation she tried to assure herself that such an outcome would have its compensations. Presumably Richard would return to her enough of her dowry that she and her son could live in modest comfort somewhere. And if she used part of the money to pay a nanny's wages, that nanny would not be Molly Hernshaw. Surely if she was no longer married to Richard she would be able to rid herself of that woman, a woman whose ever-growing hold on Rick's affection had become so strong that frequently when Angelique went to the nursery she would feel like an intruder. Clinging to Molly Hernshaw's skirts, her son would look up at her with an unsmiling expression that gave her the feeling that the two of them, the middle-aged woman and the child scarcely out of infancy, had drawn an invisible but unbreakable circle around themselves.

It was in late March that one cold night she was awakened by screams—her son's screams—from the floor above. She swung out of bed. Not even bothering to seize a robe or to put on slippers, she rushed up the stairs and into the nursery.

Candlelight shone from the room beyond the playroom. The screams had become sobs now, mingled with Molly Hernshaw's soothing voice. Angelique hurried into her son's bedroom. Molly Hernshaw, in gray flannel nightshift and with gray braids over her shoulder, stood just inside the doorway of her connecting room, holding Rick in her arms.

At sight of Angelique, her son began to scream again. Still screaming, he turned his head and pressed his face into Molly Hernshaw's neck.

The woman looked frightened, really frightened. "Please, milady, he has had a nightmare. It would be best if you left."

Again the screams dwindled to sobs. After a moment Angelique said coldly, "Very well. I will wait in the playroom until he goes back to sleep."

She sat there in darkness relieved only by diffused candleglow from her son's bedroom, her heart hammering with rage. She could hear the woman's soothing voice, and Rick's sobs subsiding to whimpers. Then there was silence.

After a few minutes the woman came in to the playroom, the candlestick in her hand. She was smiling, but even in that uncertain light Angelique could see that the small gray eyes still looked ill-at-ease.

"He is sleeping now, milady. I think he should be all right for the rest of the night."

Angelique stood up. "Very well, nanny." She tried to keep all of her fury, all of her suspicion, out of her voice. She must wait until she had absolute proof, proof that her husband could not ignore. "Good night," she said, and returned to her own room.

Now she became the soft-footed one, the listener at doors. Often when she was sure that the servants were busy on the ground floor or belowstairs, she would climb to the nursery floor. For several moments before knocking she would stand silently at the nursery door. But she never heard anything, never saw anything, that could explain her son's terrified screams at the sight of her that night, or the closed look that would come over his little face whenever she approached him.

It was not until early April that she learned what she needed to know.

The day was beautiful, with still-furled maple leaves strung like coral beads along branchlets that waved against the tenderest of spring skies. Angelique went for a long, solitary walk that took her over stiles and across fields not yet ready for planting, and finally, by a circuitous route, to a willow-surrounded pond about a mile from Lansing Court. There, among the trailing yellow-green branches, she found what she had hoped to find, wild iris still in bud, their stalks rising out of foliage that curved outward in all directions, like the jets of a green fountain. She lingered there, feasting her eyes on the graceful plants, and planning to consult Wilkes as to whether they could be transplanted to the Lansing Court garden. Then she turned and walked slowly toward the house.

She would enter the garden by the gate at its lower end. As she moved along the path toward the terrace at the rear of the house, perhaps she would see several spots where the wild iris might look well.

She had reached the tall yew hedge at the garden's foot and was moving along it toward the white wooden gate when she heard Molly Hernshaw's voice. "Now, my little love, look at this picture." Plainly the woman on this fine day had brought her small charge out to the grape arbor. Angelique halted in her tracks.

From beyond the high hedge she heard her son say in a small, frightened, and yet fascinated voice, "Cows?"

"Yes. *Dead* cows, Ricky. And here in one corner of the picture the witch is sneaking off into the woods."

Angelique knew what book the woman must be holding in her hands. It was a book on witchcraft, written in the last century when fear and hatred of women thought to be witches had gripped Europe and England and even the American colonies. She had found the book in the Lansing Court library months earlier and had leafed through it. Like most people of her more enlightened century, she did not believe in witches. Even so, she had found some of the woodcuts in that old book repellent and even frightening. Certainly it was no book to show to a young child.

"And here," Molly Hernshaw said, "we see the witch after they have caught her. See how everyone is carrying sticks to put around her feet, so that the fire will reach high?"

Sickened, Angelique recalled details of that woodcut. The witch, a hideous creature with warts on a face whose nose and chin almost met, stood bound to a pole. People, including a small girl and a boy, were carrying sticks to add to those heaped around the witch.

Then, with a shock that knotted up everything inside her, she heard her son say in that small, scared, and yet fascinated voice, "Mummy?"

"Yes, love. This show how your mummy *really* looks. But as I told you, witches can make themselves look any way they want to to others, even beautiful, the way your mummy does. Now, you remember, don't you, that we must never let her know we know her secret?"

Rick must have nodded, because his nanny went on, "That's my little love. Just keep remembering that if she ever

does guess we know, she will change back into her real shape right before our eyes. And once she lets us see her as she really is, you and I won't be able to talk or move ever again."

Angelique's heart pounded with overwhelming pain and fury. No need to wonder now about the screaming nightmare or about that frozen expression on his little face when he saw his own mother coming toward him. She ached to rush into the garden, snatch the book from the woman's hands, attack her plump face with her fingernails. But she must do nothing of the sort. She must not frighten him any more than he was already.

She turned, went noiselessly to the corner of the hedge, and then walked along the side hedge toward Lansing Court's front gateway. How much did her son understand of what the woman told him? Not all, certainly, but enough that if the woman was not stopped right now she might leave a life-long scar upon his spirit.

She remembered Richard saying that it was not until shortly before his mother's death that he had found himself able to feel at all close to her. Was that Molly Hernshaw's doing? Had she, at a time so early in his life that it was lost to his memory, convinced him that his mother was evil and frightening, and that only she, his nanny, was the one to be loved and trusted?

Angelique wondered if the woman was mad. Some might call it madness. Others might call it cold calculation. She had found a way to make herself secure in each post for five or six years. Oh, not that she would be dropping poison into her small charges' ears all that time. No doubt she would stop before the child was old enough to communicate clearly with other adults. But by that time she would have accomplished her purpose. Until her girl charges were old enough to be turned over to governesses, and her boys to private tutors or a school, they would cling to her as their one source of safety and love, cling to her so fiercely that it would be a rare parent indeed who would deprive his child of her.

Had she, in all her years as a nanny, ever been caught? Perhaps. But if so, the parents in question must have been unsure of their ground. Perhaps she had wept and pleaded, saying that she did not know the poor little soul would take her seriously, and that she was only trying to keep the child amused, but that she knew better now. If her employers

would just give her a good character reference, Angelique could imagine her pleading, so that she could get another position, she would never, never again tell such tales to a child.

And so, even if she had been caught in the past, she had escaped the full consequences. But she would not escape this time, Angelique told herself grimly. Molly Hernshaw would receive no "good character," no letter of recommendation, to enable her to insinuate herself into someone else's household.

When she entered the front door she found Mrs. Dolford in the entrance hall. She said, "Would you please send Daisy up to the nursery and ask her to wait there?"

"Of course, milady."

"And when nanny and my son come back, will you please ask her to leave him with Daisy, and then come to my room? I want to talk to her."

A flicker of curiosity in the housekeeper's eyes, but as always, she refrained from putting it into words. "I shall do that, milady. Did you have a pleasant walk?"

"Very pleasant." Angelique went up the stairs.

In her room she took banknotes from her desk, placed them in an envelope, and laid the envelope on a small table. Then she sat down, clasped her hands in her lap, and tried to slow the angry pounding of her heart. After about fifteen minutes there was a soft tap at the door. Angelique said from a constricted throat, "Come in."

Every inch the modest, respectful upper servant, Molly Hernshaw came into the room and smiled her timorous smile. "You wished to see me, milady?"

"Yes." Angelique picked up the envelope and held it out. Automatically the other woman took it.

"What is this, milady?"

"Your wages for the second quarter, even though this is only April. You are not to return to the nursery. You will never set foot there again. As soon as you are suitably dressed for travel, go down to the entrance hall and wait. Daisy and Jenny will pack your boxes. Then Wilkes will drive you to the inn in the village. What you will do after that, I neither know nor care."

For just a moment there had been alarm, mingled with an angry incredulity, in the small gray eyes. Now they held only pain and bewilderment. She pressed a fist to her bosom.

"Oh, milady! What have I done, what have I done?"

"Did you return the book to the library, or is it in the nursery?"

Again that brief flare of fear and rage. Then, in a bewildered tone: "What book, what book?"

"The book on witchcraft."

"Oh! That old *picture* book. Is that what you object to, milady? Perhaps I should not have taken it without your permission, or left it where Ricky could see it. But I doubt that a child that young would ever make head nor tail—"

"Stop it!" Angelique's voice shook. "It is no use. I heard you with my own ears, talking to my son in the grape arbor, telling him his mother is a witch, telling him that once he sees me as I really am . . ." Her throat closed up and she could not go on.

The clenched hand Molly Hernshaw had pressed so piteously to her bosom dropped to her side. She looked at Angelique with a face—unsmiling, grim-eyed—that few people, probably, had ever seen. "It is your own fault," she said coldly. "If you had welcomed me, as Mr. Richard wanted you to—"

"I doubt that you would have behaved differently if I had. Anyway, that is of no consequence now. Just go."

"I will not be dismissed by the likes of you!" The small eyes had a dangerous glitter now. "I have been in service to a duke and duchess. And what are you? Born in a peasant's hut, that's what you were." Her mouth twisted. "Didn't know I knew that, did you?"

How had she found out? Angelique could think of one way. Perhaps, in spite of the old nobleman's orders, one of the château's servants had gossiped to a visiting servant, some maid or valet brought there by a houseguest. Word that Angelique de Rhoulac had until lately been Angelique Dubois could have traveled through a network of servants to the staffs of other households in France and England.

Did people of Richard Lansing's class, too, know that his wife's mother had been a peasant? Perhaps. Perhaps the news had spread to everyone by now. Angelique found that she did not care.

"Yes," she said, "I was born in a peasant hut. But now I am Lady Lansing, mistress of this house, and I want you out of it immediately."

The woman leaned forward, smiling a smile that was not really a smile at all. "I warn you. If you turn me out, you'll regret it."

"You mean that you think my husband will overrule my decision? He won't, not when he learns what you have done."

"I warn you," Molly Hernshaw repeated.

"And I warn *you*. Go down to the hall and wait for Wilkes to take you and your belongings to the inn. If you do not, I will send for the constable in the village, and he will put you out of this house."

The gray eyes locked with Angelique's blue ones. Then Molly Hernshaw thrust the envelope down the neckline of her dress, turned, and left the room.

Angelique sat there until her heart rate had become almost normal. Then she went up to the nursery. When Daisy opened the door in answer to her knock, Angelique beckoned the girl out into the hall.

"I will stay with my little boy. You go fetch Jenny so that the two of you can pack Nanny Hernshaw's things. You can go into her room through its hall door, not the nursery."

"She is leaving?" It was plain that Daisy, despite her admiration of a woman who had been employed by a duke, felt pleasantly excited by the prospect of some domestic crisis.

"Yes. I told her to wait downstairs in the hall. After you and Jenny take her boxes down to her, Wilkes will drive her to the village. Now, please go fetch Jenny."

The girl hurried away. Angelique opened the nursery door. Her son sat stiffly on a small three-legged stool, his brown eyes very large in his small face. She felt his gaze following her as she crossed the playroom, closed the door to his bedroom, and then walked to an adult-sized armchair several feet away from him. When she had sat down, her gaze went to a shelf, designed for his toys, which stretched along one wall. There was the book, within easy reach of her hand. The woman must have placed it there before going down to Angelique's room.

Rick said, worry in his voice, "Nanny?"

She braced herself. Best not to deceive him and thus draw out his pain. Best not to tell him that nanny would be back "soon," and keep telling him that until he ceased to ask.

"Nanny has gone away, my darling. She will not be back."

Shock in the small face. More than shock. Terror.

"Oh, my son!" Impulsively she stood up and started toward him. He covered his face with his hands, hunkered lower on the stool, and screamed.

She stopped in her track. "Oh, darling, I won't touch you, I won't touch you." She hurried back to the armchair and sat down. "See, I am back here now. Take your hands down, Rick. Yes, that is right. Now, Rick, my dearest, my little son, listen to me." She reached out and picked up the book. "Nanny was . . . mistaken, Rick." Best not to tell him that the person who had filled his whole tiny world was a liar, lest he grow up trusting no one.

"Nanny told you that I was . . . I was really like the woman in these pictures. Nanny told you that if I ever found out you knew what she had told you, you . . . you would suddenly see me looking like . . . like these pictures. But that is where she was mistaken. See, I *do* know. See, I am looking at the pictures." She riffled through the pages. "And I have not changed. I have not changed at all, have I?"

He still stared at her, eyes wide with fear. She knew that he was waiting for the terrible transformation, the lengthening of nose and chin, the yellow hair turning to gray straggles.

Despair overwhelmed her. He did not understand. How could you expect a child not quite two years old to understand a logical argument? And even if he had understood, the fear was rooted too deeply . . .

To her horror, she knew that she had no courage left. She covered her face with her hands, just as her little boy had, and began to cry. A terrible thing, to add her tears to his fear and confusion, but she could not stop. She sat there, shaken with sobs, feeling utterly alone.

She did not hear him cross the room. She just felt his small hand fall tentatively on her knee. "Mummy."

She took her hands down from her tear-wet face, tried to smile. "Yes, Rick?"

He said something that sounded like, "Whirr it hut?" After a moment she realized that that was his version of "Where does it hurt?" She could imagine Molly Hernshaw, after he had burst into tears over some tumble, taking him into her arms and saying, "Tell nanny where it hurts. She will kiss it and make it well."

How she herself longed to catch him up in her arms. But

she must proceed slowly. Managing to smile, she touched his dark curls briefly. "It does not hurt now. Your mummy was being an old silly, that was all."

She could hear faint sounds from the room beyond Rick's bedroom. Daisy and Jenny in there, packing that woman's things. Angelique wondered if she should have Rick's bed taken to her room. No, best not. Best not to add to his disturbance by changing his surroundings. And it would be best for her not to sleep in the bedroom next to his tonight, or in any way try to force herself upon him. For now Daisy could sleep in Molly Hernshaw's old room. When Richard came down from London next Thursday—and he certainly would come, because she would write to him immediately about the whole episode—they would decide what to do. Perhaps they could even arrange for Rose Potts to come back from that family in Canterbury.

Her son's face still looked worried, but there was only a touch of that terror far back in his eyes. She smiled at him, hoping that he would say, as she frequently had heard him say to Molly Hernshaw, "Up!" meaning that he wanted to be hoisted onto her lap.

He did not. But at least his small hand still lay, almost as light as a fallen leaf, upon her knee.

33

AS SHE EXPECTED, Richard came down from London the next Thursday. When his coach turned into the drive, she was in her room writing suggestions for the next few days' menus. Thus she was not aware of his presence until she heard footsteps striding along the hall. She got to her feet to face the door. Not bothering to knock, he came into the room and closed the door behind him.

She had expected to see concern for herself and for Rick in his face, and indignation against Molly Hernshaw. Instead

she saw nothing but icy rage. And there could be no doubt as to the object of his fury. It was herself.

She cried, "Richard! What is it?"

"You do not know, madam? You really do not know?"

She said, completely bewildered, "Are you angry because I dismissed Molly Hernshaw? But I had to! I explained why in my letter. Didn't you receive me letter?"

"I received it."

"Then why—"

"I do not believe what was in your letter, not in the light of what Molly Hernshaw told me."

"You do not believe it? Richard! She was poisoning our child's mind. Specifically, she poisoned him against me, his own mother. She made him believe—"

"That was all in your letter. I have no time to listen to you repeat it. I want to settle one matter, and then go straight back to London."

Her bewilderment had given way to a chill dismay. "What matter?"

"Did that Frenchman you once lived with visit you here?"

So that was it. Molly Hernshaw had told him. Now Angelique understood what the woman had meant when she said, "If you turn me out, you'll regret it."

Angelique said, very pale, "Yes, Jacques was here."

"Did you throw yourself, weeping, into his arms, down in the library? And when he asked you why you wept, did you not tell him that yours were tears of joy?"

Angelique thought of how Molly Hernshaw must have looked out of the nursery window that afternoon and seen Jacques, after he had tethered his hired horse, walk toward the front door. Angelique could imagine her slipping out to the stair landing. She must have waited until the entrance hall was empty. Then, on those cat-silent feet of hers, she must have come down the stairs to that partially open library door.

Had she and Jacques, Angelique wondered distraughtly, spoken French or English there in the library? It seemed to her they had spoken English, just as they had before Mrs. Dolford walked away from them toward the kitchen stairs. But if they had used French, it was obvious that Molly Hernshaw knew at least a little of the language. Over the years she must often have been in service with French-speaking governesses, maids, and chefs.

Angelique said, "So Molly Hernshaw told you. She went straight from the village to London, and told you about Jacques."

"She told me."

"And what did she tell you about what was in my letter?"

"I did not receive your letter until after she had come to me."

So, Angelique thought bitterly, the woman had gotten to him first, and thus was able to nullify the effect of the letter, at least in part. She should have realized that might happen.

"But she did say that you had overheard her telling Rick some sort of fairy tale," he went on, "and had gotten the twisted idea—"

"Twisted! And you believed her?"

"Yes, essentially. But that is not the point. The point is that here, under my own roof, and in view of at least one of my servants, you flung yourself in that French bastard's arms, let him make love to you—"

"No! It was not like that! He did not even try to . . . We went out to the grape arbor, and we talked. Then I took him up to the nursery to see Rick. After that he went to the village inn, and that was the last I have seen of him."

"And it had best remain the last time," he said coldly, "as long as you are under my roof."

Stung beyond endurance, she cried out, "How can you say that to me, when God knows how many beds you have been in and out of this past winter in London?"

She saw his face flush, but he managed to maintain his cool, biting tone. "With what elegance you express yourself, madam."

"Never mind my elegance or lack of it! How can you denounce me just for weeping in the arms of an old friend, when you carry on as you please with those highborn trollops in London?"

"You are railing against not just manmade law but natural law. Men and women are different. A freedom which is permitted to men is not permitted to women. And that is the way it always will be."

"It is not natural law. It is—"

"I did not come all this way to discuss philosophy with you! I came to warn you. If you ever again compromise yourself with that man, or any man, I shall take full ad-

vantage of those laws you find so unjust. I will have our marriage dissolved, and of course retain custody of our son. You will never see him again."

Her hand, groping for support, found a chair back. "You don't mean that," she whispered. "You can't mean that."

She saw a flinching look deep in his eyes, but his voice remained even. "Put me to the test."

Weak with fear, she said, "You need not worry. There will be no . . . no repetition, with Jacques or anyone else."

"Very well. That is all I wanted to hear you say."

"Wait! Will I have to . . . ? Are you going to send her back here?"

"Molly Hernshaw? No. I have arranged a pension for her, enough so that she can retire to a little cottage she owns in Surrey. I think she may be getting too old to care for very young children."

Angelique knew then that he believed at least partially what she had written in her letter. But he was too stubborn to admit it. Besides, his rage over Jacques Latour had overwhelmed whatever anger with Molly Hernshaw he might otherwise have felt.

"Perhaps," he went on, "you might be able to hire Rose Potts again."

Another sign that he knew he had erred in insisting that the Hernshaw woman replace Rose.

"Perhaps I can."

The silence lengthened. They stood looking at each other. Angelique felt a lonely yearning. Despite his threat to deprive her of her son, she knew that if his expression softened, and if he took one step toward her, she would go to meet him.

He said in a flat voice, "I shall be down again soon."

"You are leaving now? You are not staying for supper, or even tea?"

"No, I shall stop at an inn on the way."

She stood there staring at the door he had closed behind him.

The next day she gave Wilkes a note to take to Elizabeth Cantrell. The note said that "a distressing" thing had happened, and that Angelique would like to see her at her "earliest convenience." To her surprise and pleasure, Wilkes

returned, not with Elizabeth's reply, but with Elizabeth herself.

The two women went out to the flagstone terrace at the rear of the house and sat on a marble bench in the bright spring sunlight. While Elizabeth bent over the embroidery hoop she had brought with her, Angelique spoke of how and why she had dismissed Molly Hernshaw, and of Richard's angry, threatening visit. Elizabeth listened quietly. Only an occasional tightening of her lips showed her indignation.

At last she said dryly, "My cousin Richard has all the manly virtues. He is courageous and truthful, and in the masculine sense of the word, honorable. It is a pity that he does not have some of the so-called feminine virtues, such as patience and compassion."

Perversely, Angelique came to his defense. "One could understand why he should feel angry, hearing that I had stood weeping in another man's arms."

"But why should he remain angry, once he knew that the man was a compatriot and an old friend? Certainly anyone should be able to understand how you, far from your own country, should in the joy of the moment embrace a friend from France."

"But you see, Jacques had been more than a friend." Then, as Elizabeth looked at her sharply: "How much do you know about me? Do you know, for instance, that I was not raised in a convent, as my poor dear grandfather tried to make everyone believe? That instead I was raised by my peasant mother and the man she married after . . . after . . ."

"After she found she was with child? I did not know it for a long time. But, yes, that rumor finally reached the ears of even a country mouse like me. Our cook heard it from her cousin who is a parlormaid in London, and the maid heard it from a valet whose master had once been a guest at your grandfather's château."

"But you know nothing more? Nothing about my half-brother's death? Nothing about my going to Paris when I was seventeen?"

"No."

"Then I should like to tell you." In fact, she found that she *needed* to tell Elizabeth, needed to lay the facts of her life out for inspection by that compassionate but coolly intelligent mind.

The story poured out of her. Claude's death. Her second encounter with Richard—that violent, humiliating encounter—at the tavern in Montmartre. The quiet months with Jacques, and then her imprisonment and escape.

"I went back to my uncle's house, but there was no room for me, and so I became a servant at the château. That was where my grandfather saw me, and knew by my face that I must be his son's daughter."

She paused. Elizabeth said into the silence, "I have always known that it must be terrible to be poor, and alone, and female. But until now I did not know just how terrible it could be."

Angelique said nothing. After a moment Elizabeth asked, "And it was at the château that you and Richard met again?"

"Yes. Oh, Elizabeth. I know I could never make you understand it, let alone condone it. But in spite of everything, this kind of . . . magnetism sprang up between Richard and me."

Elizabeth shot her a humorous glance. "True, I am a spinster, and intend to remain one. But that does not mean I have too little imagination to understand about . . . magnetism. In fact, when I was eighteen I met a man that I would have followed anywhere, if he had so much as crooked a finger."

"What happened?"

"He failed to crook a finger at me. Instead he married another woman. Within five years he had gambled away her dowry and everything else he owned. Now they have six children, live in frowsy rooms in London off his salary as a clerk in an ironmongery owned by a cousin of his wife's. All of which reinforces my gratitude for my present lot."

"But to return to you and Richard," she said. Then she hesitated. "Forgive me if I am wrong. But you and Richard had not been married long when you came to Lansing Court, had you?"

"We had been married three days, and I was about three months pregnant. My grandfather . . . forced the marriage."

"I see. Well, I do not think you need to feel alarmed over Richard's threat to have the marriage dissolved. I think he would not carry it out, for two reasons. The first is his political ambition. A public scandal would not further his chances of entering Parliament."

Angelique thought that over. "And the second reason?"

"I think that my cousin still loves you. I think it was sheer jealousy, not concern for his precious honor, that sent him storming down here after he heard about the Frenchman."

"*Still* loves me? Elizabeth, he has never told me, not once, that he loves me."

"Nevertheless, I think he does. Oh, he must harbor resentment against you too, for the enforced marriage, and perhaps for other things. But I think he also loves you." She paused. "As for his not saying so, have you ever told him that you love him?"

"No."

"And yet I am sure that you do. Oh, you feel bitterness toward him, and understandably so, but I think you love him."

Smiling, she laid her embroidery hoop aside. "And now, could we go up to the nursery to see my favorite small boy?"

Elizabeth stayed for tea in the library, but left soon afterward because she and her father were having the local rector as a supper guest. When Elizabeth had gone, Angelique rang for Mrs. Dolford.

"Mrs. Dolford, would you please come to my room after supper tonight for a few minutes?"

"Of course, milady." Then, a shade anxiously: "Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing." Angelique smiled reassuringly. "It is just that I would like to talk to you about something."

By the time the housekeeper knocked on her door that evening, Angelique was already regretting her impulsive request. Seated at her desk, she hastily picked up a quill pen, as if she had been about to write on the blank sheet of letter paper before her. "Come in," she called.

When Mrs. Dolford stood before her she said, "You wanted to see me, milady?"

Summoning up her courage, Angelique decided to carry out her original intention. "Now, please do not feel you have to answer this question, Mrs. Dolford. You might quite rightly regard it as an impertinence. But were you and Sir Richard ever . . ." She stopped, unable to finish the sentence.

"I think I know what you want to ask, milady," the housekeeper said quietly. "It is a question I have read in your eyes more than once. Yes, he and I became lovers soon after I

joined the staff here. He was eighteen then, and I was thirty-five."

"Did he ever tell you he . . . ?" She stopped, hearing the forlornness in her own voice.

Evidently Mrs. Dolford had heard that forlorn note too, because there was sympathy in her own voice. "Did he ever tell me he loved me? Is that what you want to know? Yes, he told me so, milady, and perhaps he did love me, but if so, it was partly the sort of love a lad has for his mother. His mother had died only a few years earlier, you know. He told me that her death had come just at a time when he was beginning to feel an affection for her that he had not felt during his earlier childhood."

She paused, and then went on, "It is quite easy for a boy of eighteen to reveal what he feels. But a man past thirty . . . Well, men are expected not to show their feelings."

Just as Elizabeth had, Mrs. Dolford was trying to comfort her. Again Angelique told herself to count her blessings. She had two good friends, a lovely place to live, and, above all, a fine little son. Couldn't she learn to regard that as enough? Was she always going to yearn for Richard's kisses and caresses, Richard's long, splendid body?

"Will there be anything else, milady?"

"No, Mrs. Dolford. And . . . and thank you."

The woman inclined her head. "Good night, milady."

Throughout the rest of that spring, Richard came down from London once a week. His manner courteous but aloof, he shared meals with Angelique. He also played with Rick, made the round of his tenant farms, and, after having kept to his room at night throughout his stay, returned to London.

But if the estrangement between her and Richard persisted, her life in other respects improved. She could almost see her son's fear and distrust receding. Careful not to overwhelm him with caresses or even words, she spent several hours with him each day, sitting quietly with a book in her hand while he played with his blocks and a large ball on the nursery floor or out on the lawn. On the day that he ran to her and said imperiously, "Up!" she had an almost irresistible impulse to burst into happy tears. But she managed to say matter-of-factly, "Very well, my son," and hoisted him onto her lap.

Rose Potts was back by then, cheerful and capable as ever.

It was highly doubtful that Rick had even the faintest memory of her. And yet within a few days he seemed as happy with her as if there had never been that interval with another nanny. Thank God, Angelique kept thinking, that she had gotten rid of that monstrous woman before she was able to inflict lasting harm.

Early in May a letter from Jacques arrived. It had a Netherlands postmark, but when she opened it she saw by the address at the top of the page that he had written it from that same Left Bank neighborhood where she had lived with him. His letter said:

Because I do not want to risk having this letter read by some government official, I will give it to a friend of mine, a wine merchant. He will mail it after he crosses the French border.

Paris has become an inner circle of Dante's *Inferno*. Since last January, nearly eight thousand have been thrown into prison for "suspected treason." Some of them—and this you will find hard to believe, Angelique—are charged with "being suspected of being suspects"! Few have been set free. Every day the death carts rumble through the streets to the guillotine. And it is not just aristocratic heads that the executioner exhibits to those howling crowds. Working-class men and women are being killed too, and peasants, and even beggars—anyone who, for one reason or another, or no reason at all, has been denounced by someone as a suspect.

It is a kind of mass insanity that must run its course. But I am thankful every day that you and your fine young son are on the other side of the channel.

I shall write again when I have the opportunity to have a letter posted from abroad. If need be, you can write to me at the above address. But please do not write unless it is of vital importance. I fear such a letter might be opened before it reaches me. And I have no desire to bow my head to Madame Guillotine for being in "reasonable correspondence" with the granddaughter of a member of the *ancien régime*.

As always, Angelique, my love to you,

Jacques

She tore off the top of the letter, burned the rest in a candleflame, and put the scrap of paper containing Jacques's address far back in a cubbyhole of her desk. Not, she reflected wryly, that there was any real reason that she should not save the whole letter. Richard was not apt to find it, not when he visited Lansing Court only once a week, and during that visit never entered her room.

Then, in early June, he did not come for his weekly visit. Ten days passed, then another week, and still he did not appear. Angelique took to lying awake late, staring into the dark. Was he ill? She desperately wanted to go up to London and see. But what if, when she entered that house in Cavendish Square, a perfectly healthy Richard told her in cool tones that he had been too busy to come, or, even worse, that he simply had chosen not to?

Finally she confided her worry to Elizabeth. After a thoughtful moment Elizabeth said, "I need material for summer gowns. I shall go to London tomorrow, and spend the night at the house of some friends. While there, naturally, I shall call upon my cousin Richard."

Two afternoons later Angelique sat on the sunny rear terrace, trying to concentrate on the red cap she was knitting for Rick, when Elizabeth walked out onto the flagstones. Angelique laid her knitting aside and stood up. "Well?"

Elizabeth reached and took her friend's hands. "Angelique, he is not there."

"Not there!"

"The housekeeper at the Cavendish Square house told me he left more than two weeks ago. She said she had no idea where he went. He merely told the servants that he was going abroad and was not sure when he would return."

Angelique felt her hands turn cold within Elizabeth's clasp.

"Angelique! What is it?"

Unable to stand still, Angelique said, "Let us walk."

They went down the graveled garden path. Angelique said, "He has gone to Rome. I know he has. We were married in the Catholic faith, you know. He has gone there to arrange for the annulment of our marriage."

"Perhaps you are right," Elizabeth said after a long moment. "For the reasons I gave you, I thought he would never do anything like that. But I suppose, under certain circumstances—"

"Such as falling in love." Her voice was quiet and dull with pain. "He is a man of strong passions. If he has fallen in love with some young girl and wants to marry her—"

"Angelique, stop it! You did not let me finish what I was about to say. There are lots of places he could have gone besides Rome. Not France, of course, in its present state. But some sort of business affairs could have taken him to Savoy, or to one of the other Italian states, or to Sweden. He might even be traveling just for the pleasure of it. So for heaven's sake do not worry yourself sick, not when he may arrive here at Lansing Court tomorrow."

He did not arrive the next day, or the next. On the third morning she was in the library, not even pretending to read the book lying open in her lap, when Mrs. Dolford came in with a letter.

"Wilkes just brought this from the village, milady."

"Thank you."

Angelique saw that the handwriting on the outside of the letter was Jacques Latour's. But even after the housekeeper had left the room, Angelique felt too listless to open the letter. Then, glancing at it again, she saw that it had been post-marked in France. He must have urgent news indeed if he had chosen not to wait until someone could post it for him outside French borders.

She broke the letter's seal. He had written:

I have grave news. Perhaps you know it already. But if not, brace yourself for what follows.

Your husband is a prisoner in the Conciergerie, charged with espionage and "trafficking with traitors against the Revolution."

I fear there is little chance that his life can be saved, especially since he did not enter France in the usual manner. Instead he entered clandestinely, using a false name, although he admitted his true identity soon after his arrest.

That is all the information I have. I have no idea what his motive was in behaving so rashly.

Even though I see small grounds for hope, I do have one suggestion. An appeal to the French ambassador at the Court of St. James's might secure Sir Richard's freedom, or at least result in a stay of execution. No, he

has not been tried yet. But very few who stand before the revolutionary court are found innocent. The vast majority step directly from the court into the tumbrils that take them to the guillotine.

My dear, I have a confession to make. I almost did not write this letter. When I heard the news, I thought: If he dies, she will be free. And perhaps someday . . .

But of course I had to write this. If I do not do at least this much to save his life, my conscience would never allow me to be happy with you, even if it came about that we married.

Whatever you do or do not decide to do, know that you have my love.

Jacques

She rose, thrust the letter down the bosom of her dress, and rang for Mrs. Dolford. She stood there, ashen-faced, until the woman appeared.

"Please tell Wilkes that I want to start for London just as soon as he can make the coach ready. I shall be gone at least overnight."

"London! But, milady! You cannot leave within a few minutes. You have nothing packed."

"I shall take only a portmanteau, and that I can pack myself. Also, I shall write a short message, which I want one of the stableboys to take to Miss Elizabeth Cantrell. Now, please tell Wilkes."

Trying not to give way to utter panic, she almost ran up the stairs to her room. A certain M.P., Sir William Ashenden, had been a frequent guest at the Lansing house in London. Since he was one of the most influential Whigs in Parliament, he would be able to make the most effective appeal on her behalf to the French ambassador.

At seven-thirty that evening she sat alone in a small room high in the House of Commons, waiting for Sir William to return from his visit to the French ambassador. On this sultry, partially overcast evening, the mullioned windows stood open. From where she sat she could see the River Thames. Reflecting sunset light, it appeared to be streaked with blood.

Blood. Rivers of blood, released by the slicing descent of that giant blade in the Place de la Revolution. Had Richard already climbed, hands tied behind his back, shirt open at the

collar, to the guillotine platform? Angelique knew now that if he had, she would not want to live. Oh, she would go on living, for the sake of their son, but she would not want to, not when always in her mind's eye she would see Richard kneeling with his neck bared for the knife.

Sir William came in. She knew immediately from the look on his middle-aged face that he had failed.

"It is no use, my dear. Although the ambassador does not know the details, he has been told that the evidence against Sir Richard is absolutely incontrovertible—which, I gather, is not the case with most of those poor devils thrown into the Conciergerie."

He went on, exasperation in his voice, "What possessed the boy to behave like that?" Dully she realized that to a man in his late fifties Richard might seem to be still a boy.

Her voice was leaden. "I don't know."

"He had a fine political future. An M.P. from Surrey is to resign soon, and I am sure Richard could have been elected to the seat. But now he has thrown everything away, probably even his life."

Then, swiftly: "Oh, my dear! I have been clumsy. But surely you already realized that there is little hope."

Buoyed up by a sudden grim determination, she thought: Oh, yes, there is hope! But aloud she said nothing.

Sir William went on, "There is one small thing that I can do for you. If you want to write a letter to your husband, I will see that it is sent in the diplomatic pouch. If you like, you can sit down at my desk and write it immediately."

"Thank you."

She went over to the desk, sat down, and, heart pounding with that same determination, looked down at a sheet of paper. She dared not write much, lest some French official, some jailer, read it and thus guess what she intended to do. Finally she picked up the quill pen and wrote the three words that he had never spoken to her, or she to him. "I love you," she wrote, and signed her name.

She knew now how true those words were. When she was faced with the fact of his impending death, things he had done in the past no longer seemed to matter. She loved him, and probably always would.

She folded the letter over, sealed it, and handed it to Sir William. "Thank you for your kindness."

"My dear, I regret only that this very small kindness is all I can do for you."

She nodded acknowledgment of his words and then asked, "Do you know how he could have managed to enter France secretly?"

"Why, I assume he took passage on some merchant ship, and then had himself rowed ashore on some lonely part of the French coast." After a moment he added sharply, "My dear Lady Lansing, you are not thinking of going to France yourself, are you?"

"No," she lied.

"It would be dangerous for you to try to enter France under your own name. After all, you are the granddaughter of a fervent supporter of Louis XVI and the wife of a man now awaiting trial in the Conciergerie. It would be almost as dangerous for you to try to enter the country secretly. After all, your husband was caught. Besides, I doubt that any merchant captain would take an unescorted woman aboard, especially one who wanted to enter France illegally."

"Yes, I know you are right, Sir William. Thank you again."

Down at the curb Wilkes waited on the box of the Lansing coach, his face holding the worried look which had settled there when, that morning, she had told him of Richard's imprisonment. She told him briefly of Sir William's inability to help. Then, along remembered streets they drove through the lingering May twilight to the house in Cavendish Square. There she told Mrs. Prewitt, the gray-haired housekeeper, that Richard was a prisoner in Paris.

"Oh, milady! How dreadful! What is to be done?"

"I do not know, but perhaps you can help. Think, Mrs. Prewitt. Did he say anything at all that might tell us why he went to France?"

"Nothing, milady. He merely told us that he was going abroad."

In her bedroom that night in the Cavendish Square house she lay awake for hours. She did not doubt that Sir William was right in his belief that she would find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find a merchant captain willing to help her enter France secretly. She might spend days looking for a ship's captain she could bribe. And in the meantime, Richard . . .

With an effort she blotted out a mental image of that descending knife. There must be some way of getting to France. Right now the best thing to do was to return to Lansing Court as soon as possible and talk to Elizabeth. In Angélique's hurried note to her friend she had outlined the contents of Jacques's letter. No doubt Elizabeth's cool intelligence was already at work on the problem.

Around ten o'clock the next morning the coach driven by Wilkes passed the turnoff to Romney Marsh. She gazed down it, that road she had taken one memorable February day, and then driven home through the darkness to an enraged husband.

A sudden thought held her motionless for a moment or two. Then she leaned out of the coach window. "Wilkes! Stop!"

He reined in and quickly descended from the box. "What is it, milady? Are you ill?"

"No, not ill. Wilkes, tell me. That cousin who helped you mend the coach wheel that day. He is a smuggler, is he not?"

Wilkes looked shocked at her impropriety. "Milady!"

"Please, Wilkes. I know it is discourteous to ask such a question. But I must get to France. Perhaps your cousin can help me."

"France!" Alarm replaced the reproach in his face. "You must not! Look what happened to Sir Richard."

"I have one great advantage over Sir Richard. In France he is an obvious foreigner. But I am a Frenchwoman. What is more, I can speak French with the accent of a peasant girl from the provinces, because, as you probably know, Wilkes, that is what I once was."

He did not reply to that. Instead he said, "Please, milady, do not go. Keep safe. If not for your own sake, then for the sake of your son."

"Wilkes, if Sir Richard is killed, especially without my doing everything in my power to try to save him, I will be so . . . so crushed with guilt as well as grief that I will be of little use to my son anyway. And if I am caught, Wilkes, if I don't come back, Miss Elizabeth will raise my son. I know she will. I will arrange it with her before I leave.

"And now, Wilkes, will you take me to your cousin?"

After a long moment he said heavily, "If I must, milady. It

will be best if you wait outside the hut. I will make the arrangements."

She did sit there in the coach, on the deserted road that ran through flat pastures again white with sheep, past the reedy bogs, over the narrow bridges. Today she was blind to the beauty of drifting cloud and changing light, deaf to lark song spilling down to mingle with the cries of young lambs. All she could think of was the man shut up in that damp, ancient prison across the channel.

Wilkes came out of the hut. "It is arranged, milady. I am to bring you here at dusk three nights from now. My cousin's fishing boat, with you aboard, will sail as soon as it is fully dark."

"Three nights from now! Wilkes! If we wait that long, Sir Richard may already have been . . ." She could not finish the sentence.

"There is no help for it, milady. My cousin will not sail until the dark of the moon. After all, he must think of his own safety, since he is the only support of a wife and five children. As it is, the trip will be dangerous enough at this time of year, when the nights are short. If the winds are not favorable, and my cousin sees he cannot reach the French coast before dawn, his boat will have to lie out in the channel all day, waiting for darkness."

He paused for a moment. When she did not speak, he went on, "But he will arrange for everything to go smoothly on the other side of the channel. When he lands his boat on a lonely bit of coast, the cart that is to bring his cargo of brandy for the return trip will still be there. My cousin feels sure that for ten English shillings the carter will take you wherever you want to go in Paris."

She said fervently, "Oh, thank you, thank you, Wilkes! And tell your cousin that I will pay him very well indeed."

"No, milady. I will not tell him that. He does this because he is my cousin, not for money. Romney Marshmen, you see, are very proud."

THE BOAT ROCKED. The sun, breaking through clouds, sent a rectangle of murky yellow light down through the open hatch into the hold. With the vessel's roll the yellow rectangle swung back and forth over the cloth bags crammed with sheep's wool. Angelique watched it for a few moments. Then, aware that the sight increased her faint nausea, she closed her eyes.

Hours ago she had become used to the smells in this confined space, but now, lying with closed eyes, she became aware of them again. There was the greasy smell of the bags of wool upon which she lay. Mingled with it were the aromas of past smuggled cargoes, coffee and tea and spices. There was even a faint smell of fish left over from the days when this craft had been an honest fishing boat.

To distract herself from her present discomfort—the unease in her stomach, the coarse material of the bags scratching her skin through the cotton blouse and skirt she wore—she let her mind drift back to her farewell meeting with Elizabeth, about twenty-four hours earlier. By prearrangement, Angelique and Rose Potts and Ricky had driven to the Cantrell house. After Angelique had greeted Elizabeth's frail, kindly-faced father in his study, and after she had seen the upstairs rooms which would serve as a temporary nursery, she and Elizabeth went down to the sitting room on the ground floor.

Angelique said, "I do not know what I would have done without you. Much as I like Rose Potts, I would have been afraid of leaving Rick entirely in the care of a young girl."

"Angelique, you know how much I love Rick. His care will be a pleasure, although of course I wish the pleasure had come about in some other way."

After several moments of silence Angelique asked, "And if I do not come back? If neither Richard nor I come back?"

Elizabeth said simply, "Then I will raise the boy as if he were my own."

She rose, went over to a writing desk, and came back with a small leather bag in her hand. "Here are fifty guineas. Take them."

"But I already have almost a hundred guineas. That should be enough." She had obtained the money the day before, when she had returned to London long enough to sell the pearl necklace Richard had given her for Christmas, plus an emerald brooch her grandfather had given her.

"Take the fifty guineas. Neither of us has any idea how much will be enough."

Angelique thanked her, slipped the leather bag into her reticule, and stood up. Elizabeth said, "I hope you do not think that my failure to try to dissuade you constitutes approval. I do not approve. I am terribly afraid of losing you as well as my cousin. But I know I would be unable to dissuade you from going."

"You are right. No one could dissuade me."

They exchanged a farewell kiss. Then Angelique rode in the coach through the late afternoon and early twilight to Romney Marsh. In the hut which belonged to Wilkes's cousin, Henry Judd, Wilkes introduced her to both the man and his wife, a small, brisk woman with a dark face almost as weather-beaten as her husband's. At his suggestion, she exchanged two of her guineas for their equivalent in francs, coins he took from an iron-bound wooden chest. Then Angelique changed into the clothes Mrs. Judd had ready for her, a blue cotton blouse and skirt, cotton drawers, thick wool stockings, and shoes with leather tops affixed to wooden soles. Except that the knit shawl she finally wrapped around her was brown rather than red, her clothing was almost the same as she had worn when she set out for Paris that morning more than five years before.

It was fully dark by then. With Wilkes and his cousin up on the box, the coach carried her along the road and over narrow bridges to the beach. There she thanked Wilkes again and said good-bye to him. Then she and Henry Judd walked along a short wharf to a dinghy. With him pulling at the oars, they moved over the water to the dark shape of a larger

vessel. The hands of two men lifted her and Henry Judd and then the dinghy onto the deck.

The late-spring night was short. The winds were unfavorable. When the sky lightened enough so that she could see the faces of her companions—all of them dark-complexioned men, with the same dignified and taciturn manner as that of Wilkes—they were still several miles from the French coast.

"We dare not land until dark," Judd said. "So down into the hold with you, milady."

All day the small ship, dragging at its sea anchor, had wallowed in the swells. Now and then she heard footsteps overhead, and snatches of conversation. She also heard an occasional plopping sound. She asked about the sound when, sometime during the day, one of men handed bread and cheese down to her.

"What you hear are fish striking the deck, milady. Henry Judd and my brother and I start fishing as soon as we sight another vessel. There is always the chance that it will be an English or French patrol boat."

"I see. You think that if a patrol boat sees men fishing, it will go on. But what if instead they board this boat?"

"In that case we are in bad trouble, milady, and so are you. So pray it does not happen."

So far it had not. There had been only the discomfort—the scratchy bags of wool, the smells, the boat's pitching. She was almost grateful for discomfort. It distracted her from thoughts of the danger ahead of her, and from even more terrible thoughts of how Richard, right now, might be riding in the death cart through a howling mob toward that hideous machine.

Because she had not slept at all the night before, Angelique had dozed at intervals during the day. Now she again fell asleep. When she awoke, it was completely dark. She could barely make out the head and shoulders of a man in the hold's opening, and a hand reaching down to help her up the short ladder.

After the closeness of the hold, the night air on deck seemed cool. She wrapped the shawl more tightly around her and looked over the black water to where lines of low waves rushed against a palely gleaming beach. France, she thought. Despite her hardworking years on the Dubois farm, despite the frequent grimness of her life in Paris, she felt something

deep within her stir at the thought that soon her feet would touch French soil.

Henry Judd said, "First we will take the wool ashore, milady."

She stood silently by the mast while the three men loaded bags of wool into the dinghy. They made four trips between boat and shore, returning each time with small kegs, doubtless filled with brandy, which they stored in the hold. After one last trip ashore, Henry Judd rowed back to fetch her.

As they neared the beach, he shipped his oars and let the small waves push the dinghy until its keel grated on the sand. She stepped out onto the beach, and then, puzzled, looked around her. No sign of the wool sacks or of the other two men.

"Follow me," Henry Judd said.

They went across the beach and up a narrow road between fields that smelled of green, growing things. Ahead loomed a building, probably a barn, with light showing between its cracks. When they reached it, Judd whistled softly. The door opened slightly and he and Angelique slipped inside. Yes, it was a barn. By the light of a lantern hanging on the wall, she saw that a wagon, now loaded with the sacks of wool, stood in the middle of the dirt floor. Against one wall an unhand-some but sturdy-looking gray horse stood in its stall.

There was a fourth man in the barn, an old man with graying dark hair and almost black eyes. He wore a blue blouse and loose breeches that hung below his knees. Henry Judd said, "This is Jean. He will take you to Paris."

The old man did not pull his forelock, or bow, or call her milady. Instead he gave her a surly nod. Angelique was amused and gratified, rather than offended. She recognized that kind of surliness. It was the manner of a French peasant toward strangers who appeared to be of his own class. She felt almost sure then that she could move through revolutionary Paris without attracting undue attention.

Henry Judd said, "We must go now. With luck, we will reach Romney Marsh before daylight."

She said, "Good-bye. Have a safe journey. And my most heartfelt thanks to all of you."

When they had gone, she said to the old man, "Shall we leave now?"

"Don't be a fool, girl. People traveling at night can get ar-

rested. I'll sleep in the field. You stay in here. Don't leave the lantern burning."

He went out. She carried the lantern over to a heap of straw in one corner. The straw looked and smelled reasonably fresh. She placed the lantern on the ground. Then, under the mild, incurious gaze of the gray horse, she lay down and blew out the lantern. Despite her worries and the strangeness of her surroundings, she was so tired she fell asleep almost immediately.

The creak of the barn door and then a shaft of red sunrise light awoke her. She sat up. Jean thrust a paper-wrapped parcel at her. "Bread and cheese. You'll find carrots and peas and radishes in the fields."

"But if the farmer sees me . . ."

"He'll do nothing. Those English friends of yours pay him well for the use of his barn. Now, hurry with your breakfast. Paris is a long way off."

She not only found carrots and peas and radishes. She found a brook in which to wash the sleep from her face. Back at the barn the old man demanded twenty francs in advance, and she gave them to him. Then they both climbed to the high seat. As the wagon moved along the road through the fresh morning air, she asked, "What if soldiers stop us?"

"I'll give them this." He took a piece of paper from the pocket of his smock and handed it to her. It was a bill of sale for twenty bags of wool. The seller was listed as Pierre Lemaire, farmer, and the purchaser as La Porte Cloth Factory, Paris.

"Did you write this?"

"Of course not. Do I look like I can write? One of your English friends wrote it."

"Are you really taking the wool to that cloth factory?"

"Yes. They know it is smuggled from England. But they don't care, as long as the price is cheaper."

It took the plodding gray horse four days to reach Paris. They stopped at farms each night, where Angelique slept in a barn or other outbuilding, and Jean in the fields or, on the one night the weather was inclement, under an old wagon in the farmyard.

It was around noon when they reached one of the city's southern gates. The National Guardsman on duty said, "What have you got there, old man?"

"Wool for La Porte Cloth Factory."

Jean handed over the bill of sale. The guardsman's overly shrewd look as he scanned it made Angelique think he could not read.

"Seems in order." He handed the paper back. "And what have you got there on the seat beside you? Daughter? Granddaughter?"

"Just a girl I picked up on the road. Said she wanted to go to Paris."

She and Jean had decided upon that story. Some might doubt that she and the black-eyed old man were relatives.

"So you wanted to come to Paris. And what do you plan to do here, my pretty?"

She said, with a saucy air that made her meaning unmistakable, "I plan to go into business."

He laughed. "And a great success you will be. Where do you plan to offer your wares?"

"Where will they bring the best price?"

"Try the streets around the Tuileries. That is where the best-looking girls gather. If I can stay out of wine shops and save enough of my pay to afford you, I may come looking for you there. Well, drive on, old man."

Minutes later, as the wagon jolted over cobblestones, Jean asked, "Where is this place you are going?"

Because they had entered the city from the south, they were already on the Left Bank. "I will guide you. Keep bearing toward the river."

She had a growing sense that time had turned back to those months she had spent with Jacques. The clothes she wore were much like those she had owned then, with the exception of that green dress and cloak he had bought for her. She remembered some of the shops they passed on the narrow, twisting streets. Even some of the people who moved along the sidewalks looked familiar.

They passed the tall old house where she had lived with Jacques. A few houses farther on she saw a number above a doorway. "Stop here."

He reined in. "You want me to wait until you make sure this friend of yours is there?"

"No, thank you. If he is not, I will just have to look for him. Good-bye. And good fortune."

She went through an open doorway into a hall. Smell of

ancient wood and mildew. A door opened partway and a woman with untidy red hair peered out.

Angelique asked, "Does Monsieur Jacques Latour live here?"

"Top floor."

And so here, as in that other house, Jacques had judged that light and air were worth climbing several flights of stairs. Again with that sense that time had moved backward, she climbed through smells of wine and cooking, through sounds of family quarrels and children at play and a woman singing. At the top of the last flight she knocked on a door.

Footsteps. The door opened.

She saw astounded joy in Jacques's blue eyes, quickly followed by consternation. He reached out, drew her over the threshold, closed the door. She gained a swift impression of a room smaller than that other attic room, but just as bright and airy. At its far end a table held a pen in its holder and scattered paper.

"Oh, Angelique, Angelique! If I had even dreamed you would come here, I would never have—"

"I had to. There was no other way. This M.P. I went to, this friend of Richard's, said he could do nothing."

Hand under her elbow, he led her across the room to where two straight chairs stood on either side of the table. When they had sat down, she said, looking at the scattered papers, "Are you writing for some newspaper?"

"Yes," he said distractedly, "under a pen name." Then, in a carefully even voice: "You must love him a great deal to have come here like this."

"I do love him. I know that is not what you want to hear," she said wretchedly. "But God knows that if anyone deserves not to be lied to, that person is you."

His smile was wry. "It is not your fault. We cannot choose whom we will love. The world might be a much happier place if we could, but we can't."

"Jacques. do you know if he is still . . . still . . ."

"I am sure he is still alive. Even with cartloads of people dying each day, the execution of an English aristocrat would have caused enough of a stir that I would have heard of it."

"Help me! Help me to save him, Jacques."

"I told you, my dearest. If a member of the English Parlia-

ment cannot bring enough pressure to free him, how can you expect—?"

"But there must be some way! Surely there is someone with power, someone who can be persuaded . . . or bribed."

He picked up a piece of paper, gave it an obviously unseeing stare, tossed it aside. At last he said, "There might be someone. But if I am wrong about him, if I have misread his character, the situation will become highly dangerous for you."

She leaned forward. "Jacques! Who is he?"

"His name is Raimond Dupres, and he is an associate of Robespierre. Although he is supposed to have been rendered impotent by an accident he suffered in his youth, he nevertheless has an eye for pretty women. What is more important, he is said to have become increasingly corrupt of late. The reason is easy to guess. The Revolution has begun to devour its own children."

When she looked at him questioningly he said, "I mean that those who sent thousands to the guillotine are now being sent there themselves. Hébert and Danton already have been beheaded. As power passes from one faction to another and then back, others will die, in time perhaps even Robespierre. Some of the farsighted ones are said to be constructing rafts upon which to escape the sinking ship."

"And you think this Raimond Dupres is such a man?"

"Yes. I think he is piling up money and sending it abroad."

She cried eagerly, "I have almost a hundred and fifty guineas."

"Oh, my dearest! It would take far more than that to induce Dupres to make your husband's escape possible."

"Then I will get more, somehow. But first I must talk to him. Where can I find him?"

"Oh, God, Angelique! I should never have mentioned his name to you. Don't you realize that he might, for various reasons, refuse any amount of bribe money? In that case he will have you thrown into prison, not just as de Rhoulac's granddaughter and Richard Lansing's wife, but as a would-be corrupter of an official of the republic."

"Just the same, I must see him. And, Jacques, Jacques, I am sorry to say things like this, but you cannot stop me from finding this man. If you will not tell me how I can reach him

most simply and safely, then I will follow the more dangerous course of making inquiries wherever I can."

After a while Jacques said heavily, "He takes an aperitif each afternoon at a wine shop on the Rue de Arlette, on the Right Bank. He is a lawyer, like many of the men in power, and he sees clients in a room above the wine shop. In weather like this, you would probably find him at a table outside the shop." He paused. "I think the street number is fourteen."

"What does he look like?"

"He's about fifty, a very small man, not more than five-foot-four, and thin. Because of that accident I mentioned, his left arm is useless. He carries his left hand tucked into the pocket of his coat."

Angelique stood up. Also getting to his feet, he said, "But he probably will not be there until around four o'clock. And now it is only a little past two."

"I know. But first I must go to the Conciergerie."

She had expected him to protest. When he did not, she said, "Then you think they will let me in to see Richard?"

"Oh, yes. Most of the guards are drunk most of the time, and all of them take bribes. And in those clothes you are not apt to be suspected of being an aristocrat. Just the same, be careful of what you say within the hearing of a guard." He paused. "Do you have shillings or francs as well as guineas?"

"Francs."

"Do not let the guards know you have guineas. And do not give any of them more than three francs. On that, despite the rise in prices, a man can stay drunk for several days. To give a guard a larger sum would be to excite suspicion."

She nodded.

"Angelique, there is an inn five houses from here, toward the river. It is respectable enough, at least for an inn here in the student quarter."

"And you want me to stay there?"

"Yes. When I look at you in those clothes, when I remember how happy I was during our months together . . . Well, it would be just too painful to have you stay here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Jacques. And thank you. Thank you for everything."

He smiled faintly and inclined his head.

She stood there, aching in every fiber to hurry off to the

Conciergerie, and yet feeling she had no right to leave him so abruptly. She asked, "Do you still plan to stay in Paris?"

"I don't know. Lately I have come to feel it would be no use. France has suffered greatly in the Revolution. She will suffer again in the counterrevolution I see shaping up. I am beginning to suspect that it may be decades before there will be any hope here of building the sort of society I want to see.

"And so lately I have thought of going to America. It would be wonderful to be part of a new country. Oh, not that America is like a clean new page. There is already a shameful blot on it, slavery. Just the same, it seems to me to offer more hope for more people than anywhere else."

She smiled. "But at least you will not go right away? You will be here when I come back tomorrow or the next day?"

"I will be here."

Except for when he had drawn her into this room, they had not touched each other. She smiled at him, turned away, and left.



OUT IN THE winding street she hurried toward Pont Neuf, that ancient bridge linking the Left Bank with the Ile de la Cité in the middle of the Seine. On this fine day, cool but sunny, the river was a tranquil blue. At the bridge's far end she walked through even older and more tortuous streets toward the grim walls of what had once been a royal palace but now housed the courts and all those thousands awaiting their trial—the briefest of trials, with no defense allowed and no appeal—and then the jolting ride to the guillotine.

She was aware that some hundred yards to her right rose the towers of Notre Dame. How strange, she thought fleetingly, that a church dedicated to the gentle Virgin should be so near those hellish dungeons.

She had reached the prison's cobblestoned courtyard. Na-

tional Guardsmen and civilians milled about, many of them obviously drunk. A circle of men and women, most of them young, had linked arms and were dancing to the song they sang. She knew it must be the "Carmagnole," that wild song, born of the Revolution, which she had heard about.

Two National Guardsmen lounged at either side of the iron gate that barred the prison's arched entryway. She approached the taller of them. "Monsieur, I would like to see one of the prisoners."

He studied her. "You must be straight from the country, my girl. Don't you know that here in Paris nowadays we call each other 'citizen' and 'citizeness'?"

"Yes. It is just that I forgot. I am nervous."

"No need to be nervous. Just give me five francs."

"Three."

He shrugged. "Very well."

She reached into the right-hand pocket of her skirt and brought out three coins. He took them, unlocked the gate, and said to his colleague, "The next one is yours." Then, to Angelique: "Ask the first guard you see."

Angelique stepped into a wide vaulted corridor so dim that she could scarcely make out the figure of a guard hurrying toward her. Behind her the gate clanged shut.

"Yes, citizeness, what do you want?"

"To see a prisoner, an Englishman. His name is Richard Lansing. Do you know him?"

Her eyes had grown more accustomed to the light. She saw that the man's thin, fortyish face held only mild curiosity as to why a peasant girl should come to see the English *aristo*. Probably, just as the mob was becoming satiated with blood, the guards had become dulled to the human drama—the tearful meetings and despairing good-byes—that was part of daily life within these centuries-old walls.

"Yes, I know him. It will cost you five francs."

"Three."

"Five. He is an important prisoner."

"Three. I have very little money."

"Five. A pretty woman can always get more money."

Better to give in to him, she decided. In another moment he might become annoyed enough to start asking questions.

He pocketed her five francs, then led her down the wide,

vaulted tunnel to a narrow iron gate set in one of the thick side walls. He unlocked the gate. "In there."

She stepped into a small cell lighted by a high, narrow window. The guard shut the gate, locked it, walked away. Fighting down a new fear, she stared at the two wooden stools, at a heap of straw in one corner, at the words "May God help me" scrawled in what looked like charcoal on the wall. What if the guard had been more zealous than he had seemed? What if he had locked her in here to wait, not for Richard, but for some higher officer to interrogate her?

Approaching footsteps. She whirled around. The guard. And Richard, his wrists tethered by irons, his face thinner, and his dark hair reaching to the shoulders of his white shirt. The guard opened the gate, pushed the prisoner inside, turned the key in the lock.

She saw Richard's face go white. He said furiously, "You! God damn you, Angelique! Why did you come here?"

Beneath all her anxiety, she felt a wild joy. That really had not been rage in his voice. It had been terror for her safety.

"I have come to get you out."

From the other side of the cell gate the guard barked, "Speak French!"

Richard said, in French, "You fool, you fool! Now, leave here, at once."

She said, also in French, "After I have gone to great trouble to reach you? Believe me, Richard, I do have a plan." From the corner of her eye she saw that the guard had lapsed into boredom. How often he must have heard a visitor make a fervent promise that a prisoner would cheat the guillotine.

"A plan! You have left our . . ." He broke off, but she knew he had been about to say "son." When he resumed he said, "You have left your responsibilities to come over here and place yourself in mortal danger—"

"My responsibilities are in good hands, probably better hands than either yours or mine."

"Whose?"

"Elizabeth's."

After a moment he gave a rueful smile. "I guess you are right. Hers are better hands than those of two reckless people like us. Well, if you won't leave, we might as well sit."

When they sat facing each other on the two stools, he asked, "How did you know I was here?"

"Jacques Latour. Oh, not that he suggested I come here. Far from it. He just wrote a letter saying that you were in the Conciergerie, and suggesting that I appeal to some influential person to try to get you out. I went to Sir William Ashenden. He could do nothing."

Richard's face had flushed. She knew he must be thinking of how he once had railed against "that French bastard." He said, "From all you have told me about him, Latour seems to be a good man."

"Yes." She wanted to add: How I wish I could love him rather than you. Instead she said, "Is it so very terrible in here?"

He shrugged. "I suppose it could be worse. Although I am not allowed a razor, I can hire a guard to shave me. He also bought me another shirt, so that his wife can launder whichever one I don't have on. You see, I have a little money left over."

She thought: Left over from what? For what reason had he come to Paris, and landed himself in these straits? She dared not ask. With that guard only a few feet away, it would be like asking Richard to testify against himself.

He smiled wryly. "One thing can be said for this place. The society does not grow monotonous. Every day, scores leave us, and scores of other people join us."

"Richard! Don't!"

"I am sorry. In this place one comes to make such jokes."

The guard called, "Time is up."

She said hurriedly, "I will be here tomorrow, with a plan."

"Angelique, please! All your plan can do is to place you in here with me."

"I will be back tomorrow."

"Now, come on, citizeness," the guard said. "I mean it. You must leave."

She leaned toward Richard. Manacled hands on his knees, he too leaned forward, and covered her mouth in a kiss that, even in this dreadful place, brought her memories of his lips, kissing not just her mouth, but her whole body. Then she rose and went through the gate the guard had opened.

WHEN SHE EMERGED from the dark vaulted tunnel into the square, bells all over the city were sounding the hour of four. She quickened her pace. If Jacques were correct, Raimond Dupres might already be drinking an aperitif outside number fourteen Rue de Arlette.

She hurried across the bridge and past the Tuileries, where the royal family had been housed after they were escorted by the mob from Versailles. She turned left, then right, then left again along a series of winding streets. Now and then she passed a bakery or laundry or wine shop where she had tried to find employment during those bleak months after Jacques fled Paris. Yes, here was the Rue de Arlette, just where she remembered its being. And there ahead was the wine shop.

Two men sat, at widely separated tables, in front of the shop. One was a black-bearded man who appeared to be of normal size. The other man, although middle-aged, with hair more gray than blond, looked no larger than a thirteen-year-old. As she drew closer, she saw that his left hand rested in his coat pocket.

"Monsieur Raimond Dupres?"

Surprised appreciation in the shrewd light blue eyes looking up at her. "Yes, citizeness?"

"May I talk to you?"

He smiled. "Try elsewhere, my dear. You are a pretty creature, but I am not in the mood."

"Monsieur, you do not understand. I wish to denounce someone to the tribunal." It was a story she had decided upon in hope of securing his attention, and drawing him away from other listeners. "If I could talk to you privately . . ."

Boredom in his face now, as if he long since had wearied of people denouncing their fellow Parisians as traitors. "I am

not a judge, my dear. Go to the Palais de Justice with your story."

She looked at the black-bearded man. Seated at least twenty feet away, he seemed absorbed in his newspaper. She said in a low voice, "Monsieur, I did not tell you the truth. What I really want is to get someone free from the Conciergerie. An Englishman, Sir Richard Lansing. If you will help me, I will make it extremely worth your while."

His gaze, incredulous and amused and rather scornful, flicked over her knit brown shawl, her blue blouse and skirt. Then his gaze focused on the hands with which she held the shawl around her. His expression changed. She knew why. Her hands no longer matched this rough clothing. They were as white now as if she had never wielded a scythe, never washed a dish or scrubbed a floor.

As if suddenly making up his mind, he got to his feet and laid a coin beside his now-empty wineglass. "Please come with me." She followed him to an open doorway and then up a flight of stairs. He opened a door and stood aside for her to enter.

The room into which she stepped was furnished with a paper-strewn table, two chairs, and a high desk. A man seated at the desk on a tall stool turned to look at them as they entered. Despite his comparative youth, he wore thick-lensed glasses.

Dupres did not bother with introductions. "Get me all the newspapers, Gerard."

"All? Even the ones from Left Bank print shops? But, monsieur! That might take me two hours."

"Never mind. Get them."

When the clerk had gone, Dupres said, "Sit down, please." Then, facing her across the table: "Who are you?"

"Sir Richard Lansing's wife."

He studied her for a moment and then nodded, as if accepting her statement. "I can see, madame, why you chose such clothing for your errand here in France. Still, it seems an odd costume for you."

"Not so odd. I was raised as a peasant."

He frowned. "My information was that Sir Richard was married to the granddaughter of a French nobleman."

She nodded, "My natural father was Phillipe de Rhoulac,

son of the late Duc de Rhoulac. But my mother's people were peasants."

"I see. Now, you said, I believe, that I would find it worth my while to secure your husband's release."

She leaned forward. "Monsieur, I have almost a hundred and fifty guineas—"

"A hundred and fifty guineas! Surely you jest."

He was not trying to bargain. The cold amusement in his face was genuine. Plainly he considered her offer grossly inadequate.

Then he said, "Do not look so despairing, madame. I am sure we can work something out." He paused. "Your husband is a wealthy man, no?"

She said distractedly, "I am sure his is not one of the great English fortunes. But beyond that I really cannot say. He has never discussed such matters with me."

His tone was impatient. "Surely you must have some idea of his holdings."

"Yes. He has a manor house and six tenant farms in Kent. And he has a house in London, in Cavendish Square. I do not know whether he has a large bank account or any sort of industrial shares."

"Probably he has not. The English country gentry tend to put everything into land. But what he has will suffice. Since I am no farmer, I will sell the manor house and farms, and keep the town house."

As she gazed at him, bewildered, he said, "Madame, if you and your husband wish it, a National Guard officer and two guardsmen will appear at the Conciergerie tomorrow evening with orders that your husband is to be transferred immediately to the dungeons at Vincennes. On the way there your husband will somehow contrive to seize a musket from one of the guards and make his escape. At least that will be the official story."

She asked tautly, "And what will really happen?"

"Another coach will be waiting outside the city walls. Your husband will enter it and be driven to Fleurette, a small town about fifteen miles east of Paris. After that it will be up to you and your husband to make your way to the coast and back to England."

"And your price, monsieur?"

"What I indicated. Tomorrow you will take documents to

the Conciergerie for Sir Richard's signature. These documents will transfer to me sole title to his English properties, in return for valuable consideration, as the legal phrase goes. And indeed it will be a valuable consideration, nothing less than his life. Once he has signed the documents, you will bring them back here to me."

She was afraid to ask the question lest she anger him, and yet she had to. "Monsieur, what guarantee do we have that once you have these signed documents in your hands, you will not go back on your word? You could just let him stand trial, go . . . go to his execution . . ."

"So I could." His voice was bland. "But may I point out one reassuring factor. When I take over your husband's English properties, which I shall do very soon, I will at best be the target of considerable ill-will. If it became known that I had taken deed to his properties and then let him die, I would be the object of universal loathing. Some of his kinsmen or friends might even take appropriate revenge. I should like to avoid that possibility. I should like, if I can, to live out my life in relative peace and comfort, even though I shall be a stranger in a strange land.

"And let me point out something else, madame. I am taking a risk, and I do not refer to just the risk of having my head sliced off if it ever becomes known that I enabled your husband to escape. Even if everything goes well, your husband might try to go back on *his* part of the bargain, might try to regain control, by legal means or other, of the property he deeded over to me for saving his life."

"My husband would not do that!"

"No, I do not believe that he would. I merely point out that both he and I have to trust each other."

After a moment she asked, "If you knew that he was in the Conciergerie, and had English properties, why is it that you have not tried to strike this bargain with him earlier?"

"It would have been too dangerous. How would it look if I, a deputy, interviewed a prisoner shortly before his escape? This way my name does not appear in the matter at all. You are the one who will obtain your husband's signature. As for the order requiring his transfer to Vincennes, it will be signed, not with my name, but that of a deputy who, I happen to know, is visiting his mistress in Marseilles. No, Raimond Dupres will not figure in it. Dupres will soon just drop out of

sight, as so many politicians have done lately. People will speculate for a few days as to whether I left the country or was killed by enemies and thrown into the Seine. Then they will forget. And in due time Paul-Pierre Laplace will arrive in England, bearing deeds to properties in Kent and London."

"Paul-Pierre . . . Oh, I see. That is the name you will assume, the name that will be on the deeds."

"Exactly."

She said slowly, "Richard will have nothing."

"He will have his head, madame. Without it, what good would a dozen London houses and country estates do him?"

She said tautly, "I know. When shall I pick up the documents?"

"Be here at nine-thirty tomorrow morning. You can take them straight to the Conciergerie, and then bring them back here. By eleven tomorrow night you can be embracing your husband in the inn at Fleurette."

She nodded, unable to speak, and got to her feet. She was eager to reach that attic room on the Left Bank and tell Jacques of the success of her mission, even though she knew he would not receive the news with unmixed delight.

"Please don't leave yet, madame." Then, when she had sat down again: "You say you have one hundred and fifty guineas?"

"About that."

"I shall need a hundred right now."

"But, monsieur! Already you are getting—"

"The English properties are not mine yet. And I must immediately have enough money to bribe five men—the officer and two other guardsmen, and two coachmen."

She and Richard would be almost literally penniless. But that really did not matter. Only his staying alive mattered. She reached into the deep pocket of her skirt, brought out a leather bag, and began to count out the coins.

A GRAY SKY seemed to be pressing down on the cobblestoned square as she hurried across it the next morning toward the gates of the Conciergerie. She had a sense that the day's humidity increased her tension, her consciousness of the folded documents thrust down the front of her blouse. When he had handed them to her half an hour ago, Dupres had said, his face rather pale, "Keep in mind that these are not just deeds to your husband's properties, madame. If they fall into other hands, they will become tickets to the guillotine, not only for him but for you and myself as well."

The same guards were on duty at the gate. The one who had admitted her the day before said, "Hello, citizeness. Back again?"

She nodded and gave him three francs. The gate opened briefly. She stepped into the dank air and dimness of the long cobblestoned vault. A stocky guard was moving unsteadily toward her. Her heart leaped. She had worried about a sober guard, sharp-eyed and sharp-eared. This one appeared blessedly drunk.

He said, slurring his words, "Not so fast, my girl." Even though her eyes were not yet accustomed to the dim light, she could see that his face was dark and that his nose appeared to have been broken at some time in the past. "What are you doing here?"

"I would like to see Richard Lansing."

"Who?"

"An English prisoner. He is tall, and in his early thirties—"

He broke in testily, "You don't have to tell me what the Englishman looks like. It will cost you three francs."

She gave him the money. He led her to the same cell she had entered the day before and then clanged the gate shut after her. Knees shaking, she sank onto one of the stools.

Footsteps. Richard came in. As on the day before, his hands were manacled. The guard shut and locked the gate.

For a moment Richard looked down at her grimly. "Angelique, have you no sense at all?"

She said swiftly, her voice rising above his, "Sit down, Richard. I brought the papers you wanted." From the corner of her eye she saw the guard take a glass flask from beneath his coat and tip it to his lips. To judge from the fumes, the flask contained brandy.

Richard sank onto the other stool. She drew out the folded documents and handed them to him.

He unfolded the sheaf of paper. Swiftly his gaze went down a long page. Then his questioning eyes met hers.

She smiled, silently willing him to understand.

As if belatedly aware of what was going on in the cell, the guard said, "Hey! What you got there?"

"I have brought him his last will and testament."

The guard laughed. "High time, too. Somebody said the English *aristo* is to be tried day after tomorrow."

Everything within her tightened up. Forty-eight hours from now he had been due to stand briefly before the tribunal and then step into the cart. What if Jacques had written his letter a few days later than he actually had, or what if she had been delayed several days longer in her journey from Lansing Court to this dreadful place?

She said, "Will you fetch pen and ink? I will give you another two francs."

He thrust his hand through the bars. She laid two coins on his dirty palm. The sound of his unsteady footsteps dwindled.

In a swift, low voice she explained the plan to Richard. The officer and two guardsmen who would arrive that evening with the order for his transfer. The second coach that would be waiting outside the city walls.

"And I will be waiting for you at the inn at Fleurette. We can decide there how we are to get back to England."

He said slowly, "Do you realize that if I sign this I will have nothing at all to share with you and our son?"

"You will have your life to share with us. Oh, Richard. You can always try to acquire more money and lands. But if you are still in this place day after tomorrow . . ."

The guard was coming back. He thrust between the bars a small silver writing stand that held a covered inkwell and a

quill pen, and then stood watching while Richard signed the documents.

"Now, give me the pen and ink," the guard said. "I got them off Monsieur Lescaut's desk." Lescaut, Angelique realized, must be a prison official important enough to have a silver writing stand. "I have to get that back before he finds out."

Carrying the pen and ink, the guard went away. Angelique said as she thrust the documents down the front of her blouse, "We won't be entirely penniless. I still have about forty guineas."

"And I have the equivalent in French money of almost twenty pounds. I intended to . . ."

He broke off. Angelique thought: Intended to what? Distribute the money among the other prisoners before he went to face the tribunal and the certain sentence of death?

Richard was looking at her, brown eyes humorous. "What a hard-bitten character you are, Angelique. And to think I had to find myself almost at death's door before I discovered that."

The guard was back. He opened the gate. "Time to leave, citizeness." As she took a step toward Richard, the guard said with drunken pomposity, "You must obey me, citizeness. I said that it is time for you to go."

She exchanged a quick smile with Richard and then walked out of the cell. No matter that they had been unable to kiss. Tonight, when they were safely out of Paris, there would be time for kisses.

About fourteen hours later she paced up and down the candlelit room at the inn. It was the establishment's best room, with a big four-poster bed, and casement windows open on this warm night. She had been glad that the room, the inn's only private one, was available, even though she had hated to pay for it out of her small store of money. At least now she and Richard would have privacy when he got here.

When he got here. During the last hour or so she had been trying not to substitute the chill word "if" for "when." Only minutes ago she had heard the tall clock downstairs strike two. Where was he?

Had Raimond Dupres, after all, tricked them? Was Richard still back there in the Conciergerie?

To escape that agonizing thought, she reviewed in memory the hours since she had last seen her husband. From the Conciergerie she had gone to Dupres's office and handed him the documents. Everything was in readiness, he had assured her. The guardsmen would take Sir Richard from the prison around seven o'clock. By midnight at the latest he should arrive at the inn in Fleurette.

After saying good-bye to Dupres, she crossed to the Left Bank and climbed to Jacques's attic room. He said, after he had opened the door to her, "Did your husband sign the documents?"

"Yes."

"Then it is all settled? Tonight he will go free?"

"Yes."

He smiled, but in his dark blue eyes she could read a wry regret that he was not another sort of man, the sort who would not have felt impelled to write that letter to her.

"Jacques, I must get to that inn tonight. Do you know if there is a public coach that—"

"I am sure there is not. But near the river end of this street there is an establishment where you can hire a coach and coachman to take you there. If you will wait here, I will make the arrangements."

After he returned, they spent several hours talking quietly, not of the present or future or recent past, but of their growing-up years in the Château de Rhoulac district. They had shared a meal of bread and sausage. Then, at dusk, she had walked to the establishment near the river, a large inn which also rented horses and vehicles. The sky had cleared by that time. Under a first-quarter moon she had traveled in her hired coach to this village inn.

She had sensed that the stout middle-aged proprietor was suspicious of her. Why should he not be suspicious of a young woman who wore a simple blouse and skirt and yet had arrived in a hired coach and asked for "a private room for my husband and myself."

Seeing his doubt, and terrified that he might send word to the village constabulary, she knew she must somehow allay his suspicion. She reached into her skirt pocket, brought out a franc piece, and said imperiously, "And I am thirsty and hungry. Please bring bread and cheese to the room, and a bottle of your best wine with two glasses."

He took the coin and then said, narrow-eyed, "Madame has expensive tastes."

"Why not, as long as the gentleman is paying for it?" she said, and then managed to look abashed.

He chuckled. "So that is the kind of husband who is coming here." He was no longer suspicious. She was just a doxy to whom some man had given money, along with instructions to rent a room at this inn and wait for him. The landlord did not wonder at that. She was certainly a pretty bit of baggage.

"Very well, madame. I shall bring the wine myself. After that I will go to my bed. But the lad over there"—he nodded toward a boy of about fourteen who lay sleeping on a pallet beside the unlit fireplace—"will let your husband in."

That had been three hours ago. For a while she had sipped her wine and gazed out of the window at fields washed by the light of the moon now low in the west. She had felt only excitement and happy anticipation. But gradually her happiness had given way to an anxiety that set her to pacing up and down through the candlelight.

Sound of wheels over the courtyard's hard-packed earth. A knocking on the door below. Then a familiar step on the stairs.

She ran to the door and flung it open. His arms went around her and his mouth covered hers in a long kiss that left her weak. She said, cheek against his shoulder, "Close the door."

He reached back, closed the door, and then again caught her close to him. She said, "Oh, my darling. I thought something had happened to you."

"One of the horses lost a shoe. We found a blacksmith in a village a few miles back, but we had to wake him up, and he took his revenge by working as slowly as possible."

"I haven't heard the coach leave."

"It is still down there. I have arranged for the driver to take us to Briault, starting at daybreak."

"Briault?"

"It is a fishing village near Calais. The merchant-ship captain who brought me from England put me ashore there. I stayed for that first night with a former shipmate of the captain."

"And we can go back there?"

"Yes. The arrangement was that when I was ready to leave

France I would return to that same house, and the captain's friend would send a message to the shipping company's office in Calais."

"And after that we can wait in Briault until the ship's captain sends a boat ashore for us?"

"Yes. Stop talking."

Again his lips, warm and demanding, covered hers. When the kiss ended, she said breathlessly, "Richard, don't! It is not long until daybreak. You must rest."

His hands were roaming over her body. "I need you more than I need rest."

He drew her to the bed. In his hunger he did not take the time to undress her slowly, sensually, as he so often had in the past. Instead he let her remove her clothing while he stripped off his own.

If his need for her was great, she soon discovered that hers for him was equally so. Moments after he entered her she reached that almost unbearable inner tension, and then cried out in the pleasure of release. He managed to check his own desire, so that twice more, before his own throbbing release, he was able to carry her, head turning on the pillow, to that exquisite climax.

When at last they lay quietly side by side, neither of them spoke. Angelique felt there were no words for the voracious hunger, and its satisfaction, that they had just experienced, and evidently he felt the same way. Then, with renewed ardor, he turned to her, and she realized with fleeting wonder that her body's need for his had not been exhausted.

This time, when their storm of passion was over, she said into the silence, "It must be almost dawn. We had better dress." As if in confirmation of her words, the clock downstairs struck four.

"Yes, I suppose we had better."

All of the bread and cheese was left, and more than half of the wine. When they had dressed, they sat in chairs on opposite sides of the unlit fireplace, enjoying their breakfast.

After a while they placed the empty plate and bottle and glasses on the fireplace mantel. Then, as they stood there, Angelique said, "Do you realize that I still have no idea why you came to France?"

He remained silent for several seconds, long enough for her to feel a chill premonition. Then he said in a constrained

voice, "Yes, I know. I really should have told you there in the Conciergerie, but there was neither the time nor opportunity." Then: "Do you remember Ninon de Lentric?"

That premonition tightened its grip. "Of course I remember!"

"In London I received a letter from her. Someone had smuggled it out of France and posted it. In it she said that she was in the Conciergerie. Her father already had gone to the guillotine. She expected to follow him shortly. She begged me to try to save her."

After a moment Angelique said in a carefully expressionless voice, "And you responded to her plea."

"Yes." There was growing unease in his eyes. "I knew I would need money, and so I drew all the funds I had out of the bank, except for enough to meet the next quarter's expenses in the Cavendish Square house and at Lansing Court. I found it not too hard to manage to have myself smuggled into France, and I found it easy to get into the Conciergerie to see Ninon, but after that I was baffled. I had no idea of how to engineer an escape. And so I did the next best thing. I bribed one of the tribunal judges to hold out for her acquittal. After all, scores of prisoners have been acquitted, you know, even though the vast majority have gone straight from court to the guillotine."

Angelique said in that even voice, "And Ninon was acquitted?"

"Yes. The judge I had bribed asked her questions—about the Revolution, about the Bourbons, about politics in general—and her answers indicated, as I knew they would, that the poor girl could not possibly have been the effective enemy of any sort of regime. That day I was in the crowd watching the trial, of course. Obviously all the judges were . . . touched by her. I know it seems hard to believe, considering how many those men have sent to their deaths. But Ninon has that effect on people."

"And after she was acquitted?"

"She has relatives in the Italian state of Savoy. I gave her enough money to reach them."

"And then?" The tautness of her voice heightened that uneasy look in his eyes.

"And then, before I could leave France, I found myself under arrest. The judge I had bribed had confided in some-

one, perhaps a jealous wife or mistress, and that someone had denounced both him and me to the tribunal. He went to the guillotine almost immediately, whereas I . . ." He broke off.

"Whereas you remained there, and would still be there—for at least another few hours!—if your foolish wife had not risked her life to rescue you."

He said, his voice grim now, "All right, Angelique. Say anything you want. Get it all out."

Rage washed over her, like water from behind a broken dam. "You bastard! You rotten bastard! Without one word to me, your wife and the mother of your son, you risk everything to save another woman. Ninon has been the one all along, hasn't she? You wanted to marry her. And you would have, if my grandfather had not forced you to marry me."

Plainly his own anger was rising to match hers. "Perhaps I would have."

"Yes, I know. To you I was merely the best bed partner you had ever had. Nevertheless, you *did* marry me, and you had an obligation to tell me before you rushed off to save another woman."

"Now, wait a moment! As you may recall, there was considerable estrangement between us at the time."

"Yes! Because you had forced that horrible Molly Hershaw upon me and your own son!"

"That was not all of it! You forget that under my own roof you let yourself be seen in the arms of that . . ." He broke off.

"The arms of that lowborn Frenchman? The arms of that peasant ex-lover of mine? Is that what you were about to say?" From the look on his face she knew that in his anger he had been about to say something of the sort. "Yes, he was once my lover, and lucky for you that he was, because otherwise he would not have told your peasant-born wife that you were about to die, and she, the silly fool, would not have come rushing . . ."

The heat of her rage was drawing up all the buried bitterness into her consciousness. Claude lying in the wheat field. Simon standing with lowered head before the hangman. Her mother sitting silent and vacant-faced. Herself in that bed-chamber in that Montmartre tavern.

She said incoherently, "That knife. I wish I had driven it into your back clear up to . . ." She reached for her empty

wineglass, hurled it at him, heard it shatter against the wall or floor. Then she rushed at him and began to pound her fists against his chest. "Oh, God! How I hate you, how I hate you! If I ever get a second chance, I *will* kill you."

His hands shot up, grasped her wrists. Her eyes glared into his furious brown ones. Then she saw the trickle of blood from a cut on his left temple. Evidently the thin-rimmed wineglass had struck him a glancing blow before it shattered.

His eyes were the first to lose their rage and to fill with something like despair. He released her wrists. For perhaps a minute they stood there silently. Then he said in a quiet voice, "It is no good, is it? We were born to inflict pain on each other."

When she finally spoke, her voice was dull. "It seems so." Then: "Your temple is bleeding."

He took a handkerchief from his coat pocket, dabbed at his temple, restored the handkerchief. "It does not matter." After a moment he asked, "Angelique, what shall we do?"

She said nothing. Dimly she was aware that gray daylight came through the window to mingle with the candleglow.

He went on, "We could live as we were up until recently, you in the country, I in London. But now Lansing Court belongs to someone else, and so does the town house. Could we live in a cottage together, assuming I ever accumulate enough to buy a cottage? I think not. Not you and I, both of us drowning in passion and then, after an interval, launching ourselves at each other's throats."

She nodded, too despairing to speak.

"We are no good for each other." He broke off, and then said, "Hadn't we best sit down?"

Seated on opposite sides of the fireplace, they looked at each other across the wreckage of their lives. "What shall we do?" he asked. "If you like, you can come back to England with me. I will try to get money somehow." He gave a humorless laugh. "Perhaps that French lawyer will let me be steward of Lansing Court."

She roused herself enough to say, "He plans to sell the manor house and the farms."

"In that case, perhaps I can become a highwayman."

With a kind of weird detachment she reflected that his statement might not be entirely a jest. Many soldiers returning penniless from England's wars throughout the century

had taken to the road. A few of them had been from the middle class or even the gentry.

She said, "No, I do not want to return to England with you. And you know it is not just because there will be no money. I was ready to go back to you without even thinking of money. No, it is that reason you mentioned. There are too many old, unhealed resentments and outright hatreds lying between us."

Again silence settled down. "And our son?"

She had been looking down at her clasped hands. Now her head jerked up. "Richard! You would not . . ."

"Try to take him away from you? No. Anyway, how could I? I will not have the means to care for a child."

She remained silent, thinking of how, if she turned to Elizabeth Cantrell, Elizabeth and her father probably would be generous enough to support her as well as her son. But her pride rebelled at the thought. Besides, in her present shattered and despairing state, she would not be good for a sensitive child like Rick.

She said, "Perhaps for the time being we should leave him with Elizabeth. She loves him, and he loves her. In fact, she told me that if neither you nor I . . . came back, she would raise him as her own."

He said with an obvious effort, "Then it is best to leave him with her until either you or I am able . . ." His voice died. Then he added, "Angelique, if you should ever want to seek a divorce or annulment, I shall not stand in your way."

"Nor I in yours."

They looked at each other with a kind of calm despair through the growing light. He stood up, blew out the candle on the mantelpiece, and sat down again.

"About Ninon," he said. "I was never in love with her. But my conscience has always bothered me about the way I perhaps led her to think I was in love with her."

It is too bad that your conscience, Angelique thought, does not trouble you before you do things, instead of afterward. But she said nothing aloud.

"And so when that frantic letter came, I could not ignore it. I felt I must go to her immediately and save her if I could."

"I understand." But understanding made no difference. Far more than poor Ninon de Lentric stood between them.

She said, "Then you do not plan to go to Savoy? You do not want to marry her?"

"No. I never did, although for a time I considered it. Few men would not have been tempted by the de Lentric fortune."

She managed to smile. "But my grandfather offered you almost as much—and threatened to kill you in a duel if you refused."

"That is right." He too smiled. Then, as they continued to look at each other, both their smiles faded. She wondered what he was remembering. Their frenzied and unhallowed lovemaking at the château? Their marriage in the hastily refurbished chapel? That afternoon when, beaming with pride, he had forecast a future in which she would be bringing Rick to the House of Commons galleries "on days when I am to speak"?

He said, "What do you intend to do right now?"

"Wait here until you leave. Then I am sure the landlord will know of someone in this village who will take me back to Paris in a car or coach."

"You are going to Jacques?"

Her gaze met his steadily. "Yes, at least for the time being. He is not just my former lover. He is my friend."

"Didn't you say you have about forty guineas?"

"Yes."

"And I still have the French equivalent of almost twenty pounds. It will not take more than half of that to get me back to England, so if you—"

"No, no! You might have to wait in that fishing village for longer than you expect."

He said after several moments, "When you know what you intend to do, will you write to me in care of my M.P. friend, William Ashenden?"

"Yes, Richard."

He stood up then. "I guess there is nothing more to settle. I had best go down and wake that coachman and start for the coast."

She too stood up. Still he did not move. Into Angelique's memory came a poem by Michel Drayton, a bittersweet sonnet that now more than ever had the power to twist her heart:

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part,
Nay, I have done: you get no more of me.
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly, I myself can free,
Shake hands forever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows,
That we one jot of former love retain.

She did not recall the next few lines, except she knew that they spoke of love as a person, stretched speechless and with failing pulse on his deathbed. The last two lines, though, she remembered clearly:

Now if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life, thou mightst him yet recover.

But she knew that she and Richard would not kiss before they parted. They did not dare to, lest they find passion sweeping away all the sensible things they had said to each other in the last half-hour. No, they would leave their love lying—if love it was—on its bed of death.

He said, "Good-bye, Angelique."

She nodded, unable to speak.

She stood motionless, mercifully numb to all feeling, until she heard the inn door open and close behind him.

38

FINDING A MEANS of getting back to Paris proved to be not as simple as she had expected. It was almost noon before the inn's landlord climbed the stairs to tell her that a farmer was taking a load of vegetables into the city. It was late afternoon before the wagon left her on the winding street in front of Jacques's house.

She climbed the five flights, knocked, waited, knocked again. No answer. Could he have moved elsewhere since the day before yesterday, even have left Paris? As her nerves tightened with anxiety, she realized how much that she, in her new loneliness and heartache, had counted upon being able to turn to Jacques.

Then she sat down on the top step to wait for him. He had just gone out for a while, she told herself, to deliver an article he had written, or to buy food.

That proved to be the case. Minutes later she got to her feet as he climbed toward her, arms laden with a paper-wrapped parcel, a long loaf of bread, and a bottle of wine. She stood up. He said, stopping short, "Angelique!"

Her voice was constrained. "Hello, Jacques."

"My God, Angelique! What happened? I thought that by now you would be on your way back to . . . But let us go inside first. Please hold these for me while I unlock the door."

Inside the room she placed the wine and bread and the paper-wrapped parcel—roasted fowl from some nearby food shop, to judge by its warmth and aroma—on the table, and then sank down onto one of the two chairs beside it. He took the other chair, and then asked, "All right, what happened?"

"It is over between us," she said in a voice dull with misery. She went on to tell him of her furious reaction when she learned that Richard, without even telling her, had come to France to aid Ninon de Lentric. "But we quarreled about far more than that. And at last we both realized that there is no use in trying to resume our marriage."

He said in a carefully controlled voice, "Angelique, I know what pain you must be in, and I am sorry, so very sorry." Then, when she did not answer: "Will either of you try to have the marriage dissolved?"

"No. Not now, at least. Such procedure involves great expense. And both Richard and I are poor now."

He asked after a moment, "And the little boy?"

"For now he will stay where he is, with Richard's cousin Elizabeth."

He said in that voice that strained for control, "What are you yourself going to do?"

Her blue eyes looked into his darker blue ones. "If you still plan to go to America, I thought you might let me go with you."

"Let you!" His hands reached out and clasped both of hers. "Let you!"

"Perhaps in time I could send for my son, if Richard would allow that, and if it would be agreeable with you."

"Of course it would be agreeable." His hands tightened around hers. "Many of those Americans have acquired considerable wealth. They can afford tutors for their sons and governesses for their daughters. With any luck at all, we could find employment in the same household."

Her spirits lifted slightly. Perhaps hers could still be a busy and useful and even interesting life, if not a happy one. "How much does passage to America cost?"

"More than we can pay. We would have to sign a bond."

"A bond?"

"A pledge to work for some employer for so many years, in return for passage across the Atlantic and wages after we get there. In Le Havre there is an agent who hires bond servants of various sorts for American employers."

"For people like us it is a good system," he went on. "Before we even leave France we will know something of what our future will be like in America. We will know what sort of work we will do and under what terms, and even something about our employer."

She nodded.

He hesitated, and then said, "It would be best if we tell the agent in Le Havre that we are married. No respectable household would hire us otherwise, I am afraid."

"I understand."

His voice quickened. "It is wise for you to dress as a lower-class woman as long as we are in Paris. But I would advise your buying something more . . . more middle-class, something you can put on before we go ashore in America. Even though we will be bond servants, we will also be teachers. It would not do for us to dress as simply as the African slaves, who, I hear, do all the manual work in large establishments, at least in the southern part of the country."

Again she nodded. If their passage was to be paid for them, and if they were to be assured of employment when they landed, she could afford to buy a few clothes—a cloak to replace her shawl, say, and two dresses—before they embarked at Le Havre.

She said, "But first, Jacques, I would like to go back to St.

Isidore, just for an overnight visit. I want to see my uncle and his family for one last time. I want to . . ."

She broke off. He said, smiling, "You want to say a final good-bye to Angelique Dubois, that peasant girl wielding a sickle in the wheat."

"Yes, I suppose that is it."

"Then go. I will wait here for you."

He rose, went to a shelf beside the fireplace, and came back with two glasses. He uncorked the wine. She could tell that he was happy, even though, out of deference to her bruised spirit, he was trying to hide it.

He filled the glasses and handed her one. "To a new life in the New World."

She managed to say, "To a new life," and drank.

Early in the afternoon three days later the public coach from Paris left her in the dusty road in front of her uncle's house. No smoke issued from the chimney, even though they should have cooked their midday meal not long before. For an anxious moment or two as she went up the path she thought the place was deserted. Then a girl of about thirteen or fourteen appeared, carrying a wooden bucket toward the well at one side of the house. Catching sight of Angelique, the girl halted.

Uncertainly Angelique called the name of the eldest of her girl cousins. "Denise?"

"No, Denise doesn't live here now. She is married. I am Paulette."

Paulette, who had been only eight or nine when Angelique last visited this house.

The girl asked hesitantly, "Are you my cousin Angelique?"

"Yes."

"But what happened? Why are you . . . ?"

She broke off, but Angelique knew that the girl had wanted to say: Why are you dressed in those clothes? You lived at the château. You married a rich Englishman. Why do you now look like one of us?

Angelique said, "Are your mama and papa home?"

"Papa and my brothers and sisters are in the fields, but Mama's inside." Evidently unwilling to miss any of what her mother and Angelique might say to each other, Paulette

placed the still-empty bucket on the well and accompanied her cousin into the house.

Paulette's mother, seated on a stool at the table while she trimmed off the tops of spindly carrots, raised a startled face. She said after a moment, "Why, it's Angelique."

"Hello, aunt."

Again the older woman just stared for a moment. Then she said, "Come in and sit down."

Angelique sat on the stool on the opposite side of the table. Her aunt said, "Now, what on earth happened to you?"

"My husband and I have separated."

"It looks to me as if you have been separated from more than your husband. Why are you dressed like a poor woman?"

"I am poor. We both are."

Her aunt stared at her. "How can that be?"

Swiftly, omitting details, Angelique told of Richard's coming to Paris to try to rescue "an old friend" from the Conciergerie, only to find himself imprisoned. She told of how, learning of his plight, she had come to Paris and finally secured her husband's release, but only at the cost of all his property.

"After his release we . . . we quarreled about a lot of things, and finally decided to go our separate ways."

Her aunt was silent for several moments, and then said, "It is too bad you ever heard . . ."

She broke off, but Angelique had grasped her meaning. If she had remained in ignorance of her husband's plight until it was too late to do anything about it, she would now be a rich widow.

Her aunt asked, "What are you going to do?"

"Probably go to America as a bond servant. Surely someone will want to employ me as a governess."

Her aunt nodded. "That might be your best course. You are still young. How old are you now?"

"I have just turned twenty-four."

"And you have no money at all?"

"Not much, after the expenses of my journey from Paris. Perhaps two hundred francs."

"Two hundred francs! Even that sounds like a fortune to people like us. Times have been very bad."

Before she left in the morning, Angelique resolved, she would give them a little money, ill as she could afford it.

Her aunt asked, "Are you going to America all by yourself?"

After a moment Angelique answered, "I am going with Jacques Latour."

"Jacques! Is he still alive? I would have thought that by this time those political ideas of his would have brought him to the gallows or the guillotine." After a moment she added, "Quite a comedown, from an Englishman with a title and lands to a fellow like Jacques. Still, I suppose it is better than going to America alone."

Angelique did not reply to that. Instead she asked, "May I stay here tonight? Tomorrow morning I can take the public coach back to Paris."

"Of course, if you are not too fine to share a pallet with Paulette here. At least we have more room now. Our oldest girl is married, and our oldest boy is apprenticed to a blacksmith ten miles away."

"Thank you," Angelique said, and got to her feet.

"Where are you going?"

"To the village."

"I can't think what for. There is nothing there, any more than there ever was."

"I just want to see it for one last time. I will be back soon."

She walked down the dusty road through the warm June sunlight. She crossed the humpbacked bridge, and then, minutes later, stopped at the foot of the road which led to what had once been the château. She stared up at the blackened ruins, while memories of her grandfather, and her Aunt Therese, and Ninon, and Richard flashed through her mind. And then she had a sickening vision of what the château's last hours must have been like. A torch-bearing mob, wrecking furniture and paintings and statuary as it searched for and finally cornered a helpless old man and his middle-aged daughter.

She thought of the France of her early childhood, a France where men like her grandfather had wrung the last possible centime out of their sullen peasants. Well, he and those like him had paid for their blind selfishness, perhaps many times over.

She took one last look at what had once been the beautiful home of an old man who, whatever his injustices to others, had been generous and loving to her. Then she walked on toward the village.

In its square she looked at the church, the intendant's office where Jacques had served as clerk, the bake shop, the wine shop with an oxcart standing in front of it, the ox tethered to a post. She looked at the spot in the square where the scaffold had stood that bitter morning when the man she had always called Papa had climbed its steps.

She had turned and was leaving the square when she heard the creaking cart and the slow plod of hooves behind her. The cart stopped. "Give you a lift, girl?" Then, as she turned her head: "My God! It is Angelique."

She looked up coolly at Granny Monet's grandson. "Hello, Marcel."

A broad smile on the loose-lipped face now. "Who would have believed it? Angelique, looking just the same as she used to, except older. Where's your coach and your fine clothes, Angelique? Where's your rich husband?"

"We are separated."

He chortled. "Threw you out without a sou, did he?"

"It was not like that," she said coldly, and walked on.

"Wait!" With a slap of the reins he set the ox to plodding beside her. "It was just a joke. I know he did not throw you out. What man would?"

Unappeased, she walked on, not looking at him.

"Where are you going, Angelique? To your uncle and aunt's? Let me take you there."

"No, thank you."

"Your uncle and I have become good friends. In fact, he owes me twenty francs. But I haven't pressed him for it, so far."

Was he telling the truth? And if so, was he also making a threat? She could imagine him, if she snubbed him now, taking it out on her impoverished relatives.

She halted. "I am rather tired. I would appreciate a ride."

Grinning, he gathered the reins into one hand and reached down with the other to help her onto the plank seat. The ox plodded the rest of the way across the square and onto the road.

He asked, "Want to tell me about you and your husband?"

"I would rather not."

He shrugged. "Well, how long are you going to be here?"

"Just overnight."

He threw her a sidelong glance. "And after that?"

"I plan to go to America."

"America!" He laughed. "You must be hard up. I've heard that only those with plenty of money and those with no money at all go to America, the first kind to buy up land, the other kind in hope of keeping their bellies filled. I'm glad that is not my situation."

She said, trying to change the subject, "How is Granny Monet?"

"She died last year."

She said conventionally, "I am sorry."

"She was a smart old woman. But at least her going leaves more room for myself and my wife and the children." He paused. "Did you and that Englishman have children?"

"A son."

Instantly, afraid that he would ask painful questions, she regretted the admission. But all Marcel said was, "I've got five sons."

"Five!"

"Yes. Yvette had twin boys, and a year later another boy, and a year after that a second pair of twin boys. And now she's breeding again. She's due next month."

Appalled at the thought of five, or perhaps even six, duplicates of Marcel Monet growing up into manhood, she remained silent.

He drove the cart off the road and halted it under the drooping branches of a willow tree. He wrapped the reins around the cart's left-hand post.

"Marcel! What are you doing?"

He reached out and caught her wrist. "A man gets lonesome when his wife is far gone with a new one. Give me a kiss. That's not much, is it, for an old friend to ask?"

"Let go of me!"

He caught her other wrist, pulled her to him. His slack-lipped mouth came down toward hers. She twisted her face away, jerked one hand free, and slapped his cheek. As he recoiled, she jerked her other wrist free and started to climb down from the cart.

He seized her arm. "Listen, you!"

"Let go of me. You are lucky I did not spit in your face, like the last time you tried this."

"Funny. I was just going to talk about that time." There was something so cold, so ugly in his voice that she sat frozen for a moment and then turned toward him.

He said, with a smile that did not touch those cold eyes, "You paid for spitting in my face that day. Your whole family paid."

"Paid?"

"You blamed the Englishman for what happened to Claude. So did Simon. That's why he went up to the château looking for him, and instead stabbed that old comte, and got himself hung."

She whispered, "It was you?"

"That's right. I had been watching you and Claude from the edge of the field that day. I hoped that Claude might go back to your house first, leaving you alone. I'd hated you ever since you spat in my face. I was determined that some-time again I'd catch you alone in the field. And this time I wouldn't give you a chance to spit at me. I'd knock you silly and then do as I pleased with you."

While she stared at him, paralyzed, he went on, "I was standing about twenty feet away when the Englishman came riding through the woods and down the slope to the wall. I saw his horse leap the wall. The Englishman knocked Claude down and rode on. I saw you kneel beside your brother. Then you got up and ran toward your house."

Still she sat there, held mute by the thought of what he would tell her next.

"I climbed over the wall. Your half-wit brother had almost come around, but not quite. I caught him by the neck of his blouse and dragged him over to a rock that was big enough and had several sharp ridges. I banged his head against it again and again. Then I went home."

She felt a roaring in her ears, as if she might faint. For years now she had blamed Richard for Claude's death, and Simon's, and her mother's. And all the time the one responsible for her family's disaster had been this vicious lout beside her.

She whispered, "Please let me go."

"I'll be glad to, in a minute. But first I want to tell you that if you go to the intendant in the village with this story,

"I'll say you made it up." He released her arm. "Now you can go."

She slid to the ground, and on legs that felt weak, started down the road. Behind her she heard the oxcart turn around and start back toward the Monet farm.

Knowing the facts about Claude's death could not in any way change things between her and Richard. The truth had come too late to accomplish that. By now there were too many other reasons for mutual bitterness. Still, she felt glad to learn that it was not that careless thrust of Richard's hand which had caused Claude's death. Marcel thought that today he had dealt her a devastating blow. Instead, he had lifted at least a little of the weight from her heart.

She would not report his words to the intendant. Even if Marcel had not said he would deny them, she would have left them unreported. Far from attracting any official attention to herself, she must get back to Jacques as soon as she could, and then to Le Havre, and then aboard an American-bound ship.

But before she left her uncle's house she would give him enough money to satisfy his debt to Marcel, and a little more besides. Otherwise Marcel, still resentful, might harass the only relatives she had left.

She stopped on the humpbacked bridge, and for what she knew must be the last time, looked down into the swift, clear stream. Then she walked on toward her uncle's house.

39

WITH JACQUES BESIDE her, she walked up the wharf and then turned onto the wide, tree-shadowed main street of this alien city. After weeks aboard the rolling ship, Angelique had a sensation of the sidewalk tilting beneath her feet.

Most of the pedestrians moving along that sidewalk through the early-September sunlight looked prosperous, the

men in broadcloth, the women in gowns that were attractive enough, although considerably behind the present mode in Paris. When she had bought her own modest clothing for the journey, she had looked with somewhat shocked eyes at the latest fashions displayed, almost transparent dresses caught high under the bosom with ribbon sashes, and worn with enormous hats.

She had expected to see red Indians among the sidewalk crowds in this American city. She saw many Africans—black women balancing bundles on their turbaned heads, black men sweeping the sidewalks in front of shops or driving carriages along the street—but not a single blanketed figure or copper-toned face framed in black braided hair. At last she asked, "Where are the Indians?"

Jacques smiled down at her. "Sorry you are disappointed. Evidently you did not hear the first mate say that the Indians have been routed from the tidewater areas of Virginia and from most of the rest of the United States coast. Settlers farther west in the Appalachians, though, still have to fight Indians."

He took her arm. "Well, this is the place."

Ahead a sign, "Newport News Inn," projected out over the sidewalk. After they turned toward the inn's doorway, Angelique saw their reflection in one of the wide windows, he in his snuff-brown coat and breeches, she in her gray dress and mantle and bonnet. She thought: What a nice-looking couple we are.

The American-born but French-speaking agent they had visited in Le Havre must have thought the same thing, because his eyes had brightened at sight of them. "If you qualify, Monsieur and Madame Latour," he had said, "I can not only assure you of employment in America. I can obtain for you employment where you will be together. A Mr. Claybourne, who has a plantation near Newport News, Virginia, has asked me to find him a tutor for his sons, aged twelve and fourteen, and a governess for his daughters, aged eight and eleven."

Richard had spoken to her of Virginia, where he had stayed for several weeks during his visit to America. In fact, she had gathered that Virginia had been his favorite among the newborn American colonies. And if her recollection was correct, she had heard him speak of the Virginia town with

the odd name. As always at the thought of Richard, her heart twisted. But that gave her no right to argue against this excellent opportunity, especially not when pleasure had come into Jacques's face at the news that they might be employed by the same household.

"These rich planters," the agent went on, "often send their sons to Yale College in the North, or even to Oxford or the Sorbonne. And so they need a firm educational foundation, not only in English and French, but in Latin and Greek. Do you know Latin and Greek, monsieur?"

"Yes. I once studied for the priesthood."

"Splendid, splendid. Do you know mathematics?"

"Enough to prepare a young man for higher education."

"Splendid," he said again. "Now, Madame Latour, you will not need to know Latin or Greek, nor mathematics beyond simple arithmetic. But of course you must be able to write and speak English fluently."

"I suggest you test me, monsieur."

"I shall test you both. Oh, not in mathematics and the classical languages, Monsieur Latour. I shall have to take your word for that, since such matters are beyond me. But I can test both of you as to your ability to read and write English. And if you qualify, I can offer you a seven-year bond on excellent terms. Your passage will be paid, of course. On the Claybourne plantation you will have your own cottage. And the wages will be generous indeed, three hundred American dollars a year for you, monsieur, and one hundred and fifty for you, madame. When I tell you one can buy land in that new country for as little as five dollars an acre, you can appreciate the excellent start you will have, after seven years, of becoming plantation owners yourselves.

"Of course," he went on, "you may want to leave Mr. Claybourne's employ before the seven years are up. By terms of your contract, you will be able to do so by paying him the price of your passage money, plus ten percent. On the other hand, should he find you unsatisfactory and dismiss you, you need not repay your passage money. The terms are really most favorable to you."

He tested their knowledge of spoken and written English, and was visibly impressed. He drew up the bond, and they affixed their signatures.

"There is a Norfolk-bound ship leaving Le Havre tonight,"

he said, "but the passenger list is full. However, I can dispatch the bond to Mr. Claybourne on tonight's ship, together with a letter saying that you will arrive on another ship, the *Andrew Phipps*, which will leave Le Havre three days from now and will call at a number of American ports, including Newport News."

They had left the agent's office and walked along the Le Havre waterfront. On this afternoon, the start of their last seventy-two hours in France, gulls screamed harshly against a lowering sky. But Jacques was so happy at the thought that they were to live and work together, so hopeful of their future in a country that might come close to his ideas of what a society could and should be, that his enthusiasm seemed to brighten up the day like sunlight. She made a silent vow that not once during the days ahead would she let him guess that for her their life in the New World would be shadowed from the first by the thought that perhaps she walked where Richard's feet had trod before she even met him, that perhaps a waterfall which delighted her eyes, years ago had delighted his.

Now they opened the door of the Newport News Inn and stepped into a room filled with tables, some of them occupied by diners. A tall man rose from a high-backed bench beside the fireplace, which, on this warm early fall day, was unlit. As he drew closer, Angelique saw that he was middle-aged, with graying fair hair drawn back and tied by a ribbon, and a handsome face that some might have called gentle, and others weak and indecisive.

"Mr. and Mrs. Latour?"

"Yes," Jacques said, and extended his hand. "You must be Mr. Claybourne."

Angelique thought of curtsying, but decided that in this country it might be that grown women, even bond servants, did not curtsy to men, and so instead she offered her hand. He took it, smiled at her and Jacques, and then said, "I had hoped to hear at least two weeks earlier that the *Andrew Phipps* had been sighted off Hampton Roads."

"We too had hoped we would arrive earlier. But we encountered rough weather when we were only a hundred miles or so off the American coast, and had to stop in a Delaware port several days for repairs."

"Well, it is good to welcome you now. Where are your belongings?"

"We have just one trunk. It is on the wharf, beside the ship."

"Then I shall have my coachman fetch it. Please wait here a moment."

He left them. Angelique smiled at Jacques, feeling proud of him. She had thought that here, three thousand miles from his own country, and anxious to please his employer, he might lose some of his quiet dignity. But his manner to Mr. Claybourne, although respectful, had held no servility.

The planter returned. "Augustus will be here shortly," he said. For a few minutes Angelique and Jacques answered his questions about the voyage. Then he said, looking through the window, "Here is the coach."

They went out onto the sidewalk. With the trunk roped to its roof, a coach drawn by matched bays stood at the curb. Its driver was a handsome middle-aged black man, wide of shoulder and massive of head, in green livery. Mr. Claybourne said, "We shall go straight home, Augustus."

The coachman's face, impassive only a moment ago, broke into a wide clown's grin. He touched his hat with his whip and said something that Angelique knew must mean, "Yes, sir," even though it sounded like "Yowsa."

Augustus, Angelique thought, as she got into the coach to sit beside Jacques. Somewhere along the line some white man had thought it humorous to name a powerless slave after one of the greatest of the Roman emperors. What, she wondered, did that man up there on the box think of his name?

The coach carried them down the street and then into a large cobblestoned square surrounded by handsome buildings of red brick faced with white. In the center of the square rose a platform surrounded by at least thirty men. On it stood three black men, a black woman, and a white man. Angelique would not have heard what the white man was saying if a dog, running across their path, had not caused the coach's horses to shy. Evidently their rearing entangled some part of their harness, because Augustus stopped the coach and then got down from the box.

Now Angelique saw that the white man had led a black man to the platform's edge. No, not a man. A young boy, in

homespun shirt and short breeches. His hands were tied with rope in front of him.

"What am I bid for this one?" the white man asked. "Look at those shoulders! Look at his teeth. Show your teeth, boy."

Out of sullenness or perhaps lack of understanding, the boy kept his mouth closed. Showing no rancor, the white man stepped behind and with his fingers lifted the boy's upper lip, displaying square white teeth. Then he said, stepping away from the slave, "He's not a day over fourteen. You'll get forty good years of work out of this one, gentlemen. Now, what am I bid?"

The coach moved forward. Angelique shot a glance at her employer in time to catch a look of discomfort in his eyes. Obviously he felt ashamed of what was happening on that platform. And what thoughts, she wondered, were going through the massive black head of that man on the box?

The coach left the square and moved along a street of houses, mostly red brick, with picket fences and flower-filled front yards. Then abruptly they had left the town behind them. Between the oak trees bordering the road she could see fields holding rows of dark green plants.

Jacques asked, "Is that tobacco?"

Mr. Claybourne nodded.

"And is tobacco your own chief crop, sir?"

"No, cotton. Mine is one of the few large plantations in tidewater Virginia devoted almost entirely to cotton."

"I suppose your plantation requires the services of a great many field laborers."

"We have about three hundred, I believe, plus, of course, the house servants." Again Angelique saw that look of discomfort. "My overseer could give you the exact number. I leave the running of the plantation largely to him. You see, I am a lawyer, too, and I spend most of my time at my office in Newport News."

He changed the subject. "I trust you will find my children reasonably diligent. I have hopes that the older boy will follow me into the law, which of course means that he must have a good foundation in Latin. As for my daughters, Mrs. Latour, I hope you will find them no sillier than most girls their age. I don't expect any intellectual attainments from them. If they can learn to speak French and to play the piano-

forte and take a reasonably sensible part in table conversation, they will be considered sufficiently accomplished."

Angelique said, alarmed, "But I do not play the piano-forte!"

Mr. Claybourne smiled. "So the letter from that agent in Le Havre told me. It does not matter. Mrs. Claybourne gives them music lessons."

They were moving along a road beside a river now. Back in Newport News, somewhat to her disappointment, Angelique had felt no overwhelming sense of being in a new, raw land. Except for the many blacks, the town might almost have been an English one. But this broad river, running with the silence characteristic of deep water, did bring her a sense of savagery and mystery. She could almost see, slipping through the trees and undergrowth on the opposite bank, the Indians who for years had fought the white invaders of this land.

She said, "What a beautiful river."

"A tributary of the James," Mr. Claybourne answered. "The tidewater has many rivers. We are almost there," he added.

A few minutes later the coach turned off the road onto a winding drive bordered by pines, alders, and tall, shiny-leaved shrubs that Angelique recognized as rhododendrons. They went around a curve. And there was the house, set behind a broad lawn and against a background of pines. Like many of the structures in Newport News, it was of red brick, but this house was larger, with many white-shuttered windows and a broad porch supported by white pillars. Even though Angelique knew it could not possibly be even a third the age of Lansing Court, it looked so exactly right in its setting that she had the feeling that it had stood here, serene and gracious, for centuries.

The coach, its horses trotting now, swept along the horseshoe-shaped drive to the steps. The front door opened. A young black man hurried down to open the coach door and let them down the steps. Mr. Claybourne alighted and then reached back a hand to help Angelique. "Your trunk will be taken to your quarters," he said.

He accompanied Angelique and Jacques up to the front door. It opened before they reached it, and a butler in the same livery as the coachman stepped aside for them to enter.

He was about fifty, she noticed, with white hair, light brown skin, and a gravely courteous air that reminded her of Mr. Claybourne himself.

A woman, obviously the mistress of the house, stood in the wide hallway with its walls paneled in pale wood, its staircase curving upward. Apparently a few years younger than her husband, she was a woman of somewhat faded prettiness. The blue muslin dress she wore was almost as simple as Angelique's lightweight gray wool. A frilled white cap covered most of her chestnut-brown hair.

"My dear," Mr. Claybourne said, "here are the Latours. This is my wife, Mrs. Latour, Mr. Latour."

Jacques bowed over her hand. Angelique, after a moment's hesitation, dropped a curtsy. As Mrs. Claybourne smiled at her, she saw relief in the woman's gray eyes. What sort of person had Mrs. Claybourne feared to meet? Some sharp-faced female pedant? Some chic Parisienne who would make her feel provincial? Whatever sort of woman she had feared, apparently Angelique did not resemble her.

Mrs. Claybourne said, "Welcome, my dear. I imagine that you would like very much to go to your cottage and perhaps change to something lighter on this warm day."

"Yes, I would, thank you."

Mr. Claybourne said, "Then take Mrs. Latour there, Louise. Her husband and I will go into my study and get acquainted over a glass of port."

The two women walked back along the hall. As they passed a mahogany wall table, Angelique saw that its gleaming surface held a large volume with the words "Guest Book" in gold leaf on its cover. A few feet farther on they turned into a narrower hall that led toward a door which opened onto a side lawn. While they were crossing the grass toward a wall of pines, Mrs. Claybourne said, "I hope you will like my girls."

"I am sure I shall."

"It is already apparent that they will never be scholars. Consequently I feel that a long schoolday would be a waste of your time and of no use to them. What I would suggest is two or three hours of English and French grammar in the morning, and in the afternoons a similar time devoted to arithmetic and spelling."

They had entered the stand of pines now. They followed it

for about a hundred yards and then emerged into a grassy clearing. Angelique caught her breath with delight. Ahead was the cottage. Like the main house, it was of red brick, but it was so much smaller that it appeared almost like a child's playhouse.

They went inside. Sunlight poured through tiny-paned windows onto the wide pine floorboards of a small parlor filled with modest but attractive mahogany furniture. The ground floor also held a kitchen, pantry, and small dining room. A box staircase led to the second floor, where Angelique inspected a small sitting room with a spinning wheel beside its fireplace. Two bedrooms, one spacious and airy, the other smaller, flanked the sitting room.

They returned from the smaller bedroom to the sitting room. As she stood beside the spinning wheel, Angelique said, "It is a lovely little house."

"Small as it is, you will need domestic help. I can spare one of my maids—"

"No, please don't. I can manage." If she was to teach only five or six hours a day, she might find herself, in her semi-idleness, brooding over the past.

"Just as you like. Now, I filled the larder downstairs, but I hope that you and Mr. Latour will have supper with us tonight, so that we can become better acquainted, and so that you can meet the children."

"We would enjoy that very much."

A sound of footsteps on the box staircase. "Augustus and Reuben must be bringing up your trunk. I'm sure my husband instructed them to put it in the large bedroom. Well, I will leave you now. Please come to the main house at seven."

She started out of the room and then turned back. "Oh, I almost forgot. A letter came for you a few days ago. I put it there on the mantelpiece. Good-bye until this evening."

When Mrs. Claybourne had gone, Angelique turned toward the mantelpiece, her heart beating fast. The letter lying there, addressed in a familiar, elegant handwriting, was obviously a reply to the letter she had written to Elizabeth from Le Havre. In it she had told Elizabeth of the events in Paris, and of her decision to go to America with Jacques, where they both would be employed by a family named Claybourne who lived near Newport News, Virginia.

Dimly aware that the trunk had been set down in the large

bedroom, and that feet were clattering down the stairs, she opened the letter and read:

First, my dear friend, you will be glad to hear that your little son remains both healthy and happy. I plan to talk to him each day about you, and Richard also, so that he will not forget you.

I saw Richard yesterday. He had come to Lansing Court to settle some details about the transfer of his property to that Frenchman you told me about. Even though it had been only a matter of weeks since I last saw Richard, I found him changed, older and quieter. He told me that a distant cousin of both his and mine, an elderly man who lives in Sussex, has made him steward of his estate.

Angelique, in your letter you asked me not to condemn either you or Richard. Of course I do not. Apparently sometimes the lives of a man and woman can become so snarled emotionally that the only way to cut the Gordian knot is through separation.

As you know, I am prepared to surrender your little boy to you, or to Richard, at any time. But Richard's circumstances at present are not such that he can provide a suitable home for the boy. And I feel that at least for another year Rick will be too young to make a transatlantic voyage, even in the care of Rose Potts or myself.

Please write to me soon, dear friend. Give me your thoughts upon the above subjects, and tell me about the New World, which has always seemed so wild and dangerous to an Alice-sit-by-the-fire like me.

Oh, one thing more before I close. In your letter from France you asked me not to tell Richard just where in America you had gone, and so I did not. Nor did he ask. I think he feels as you do, that it is better not to have the temptation of getting in touch with you, at least until you have both rebuilt your separate lives.

With deep affection,
Elizabeth

Angelique laid the letter on the mantelpiece. How good to

know that Rick was flourishing under Elizabeth's care, even though all along she had been sure that he would. And how strange to think of Richard as an employee of a distant cousin, or of anyone else.

But she must not think of Richard now, when all her energies were needed to help her adjust to this new life in a strange land. She walked into the larger bedroom to unpack and to hang up her one dress, a yellow muslin, which might be suitable for taking supper with the Claybournes.

Around ten that night Angelique and Jacques lay in their four-poster bed in their little house, talking over the Claybourne children. The two boys, William and Roger, brown-haired like their mother, had proved to be handsome, intelligent, and, at least at supper, well-behaved. The two girls, blond like their mother, apparently were a bit spoiled. Janet, the older one, also seemed in some ways precocious. When her mother had mentioned the young son of a neighbor, eleven-year-old Janet had tossed her head and simpered. Even Carrie, the eight-year-old, seemed somewhat overdemure. But perhaps in the warm climate of southern Virginia girls tended to mature early, just as they did in southern France. Anyway, she and Jacques agreed that none of the children promised to be a problem.

"We are so fortunate, my darling," Jacques said. "We have this comfortable house, pleasant employment, and excellent wages. Do you know what I would like to do with the money we will be able to save?"

"Buy land?"

"No, I am no farmer. Someday I would like to open what the English call a public school, a place where parents, for less than what a tutor costs, could send their sons to be educated. And you could conduct classes for the daughters of planters."

"It sounds like a good plan." Would it still sound good seven years from now? She thought: In seven years I will be thirty-one. And Richard, wherever he is then, will be forty-two.

Something within her cried out: What a waste! How is it that the two of us contrived to squander our chance for happiness?

"Of course," Jacques said, staring upward, "we might be able to start such a school in less than seven years. As the

agent in Le Havre told us, we can cancel our bond by repaying our passage money, plus ten percent. So if in two or three years we feel we have saved enough . . .”

His voice trailed off. After a moment he turned to her. The light of a waning, newly risen moon, striking through the small-paned window, showed her his smiling and yet grave face. Propped on one elbow, he leaned over her and kissed her lips.

“Angelique?”

She must not brood over what was lost, she told herself. That would be compounding her and Richard’s folly. Best to give all of herself that she could to this fine man who loved her. That way one of the three of them would be happy. And certainly there seemed to be little enough happiness in the world.

“Yes, Jacques,” she said.

Reaching up, she cupped the back of his head with her hand and pressed his lips close to hers.

40

A WEEK PASSED before she could bring herself to look into that guest book.

The week had been pleasant enough. In one of the two upstairs rooms set aside for the children’s lessons, she discovered that neither of the girls was as adverse to learning as their mother seemed to believe. True, they both hated arithmetic, and their spelling was erratic. But Carrie, the younger girl, had a natural ear for French pronunciation, and her older sister enjoyed memorizing passages of Shakespeare and reciting them with dramatic flourishes. Twice that week at Mrs. Claybourne’s invitation Angelique had tea in the upstairs sitting room of the main house. She found herself liking the rather shy Virginia woman more and more.

Also during that first week, after Jacques had asked if he

and Angelique might see the cotton fields, Mr. Claybourne had said he would accompany them there. Angelique sensed that the Virginian's response, although courteous, had been made reluctantly. The next day the Claybourne coach, again with Augustus on the box, and with Angelique and Jacques and their employer inside, drove along a road through a long stretch of young pines. Growing in neat rows, they obviously had been planted not too many years before.

"After my father died," Mr. Claybourne said, "I decided to take this area out of cotton and put it into pines. In another ten years I should have a fine harvest of lumber."

Was that, Angelique wondered, the only reason why he had planted the pines? Or was it also that he wanted to erect a barrier between himself and the fields that must be the source of most of his wealth?

They emerged from the forest of half-grown pines into fields that might have appeared, at first glance, to be covered with snow. Down the furrows between the white-bolled plants, stooping men and women and children moved, dragging sacks behind them, black faces glistening with sweat beneath the merciless southern sun. Angelique, who knew something about harvesting, could feel in her own back the ache in theirs.

At least a half-mile away, at the far end of the field on the left-hand side of the road, she could see clusters of cabins so numerous that they appeared like a small town. Those, she knew, must be the slave quarters. Smoke rose from some of the chimneys. Probably slaves too old to work, or too far gone in pregnancy, were preparing supper.

Looking at the stooped figures moving down the furrows, Angelique reflected that perhaps these people worked no harder than she once had. But at least the land where she toiled had been her family's dwelling place for uncounted generations. Furthermore, she had always borne the name her parents had chosen for her. No one had possessed the power to indulge his sense of humor by forcing her to answer to Cleopatra or Hatshepsut.

A few yards ahead, a man sat, pistol strapped to his waist, astride a chestnut horse, at the field's edge. Mr. Claybourne rapped with his stick on the coach's roof. The vehicle came to a stop beside the mounted man. He swept off his wide-

brimmed straw hat. Angelique saw reddish-blond, tightly waving hair and a red face set with hot little blue eyes.

Mr. Claybourne said, "How is the harvest progressing, Halloran?"

"All right, Mr. Claybourne. That last batch of niggers you bought in Newport News gave me a little trouble, but a touch or two of the whip straightened them out."

Angelique did not actually see Mr. Claybourne wince. She only caught the impression that he had. He said, "Mr. and Mrs. Latour, this is Jim Halloran, my overseer. Mr. and Mrs. Latour have come from France to educate my children."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance," the overseer said. There was nothing overbold in his gaze. Nevertheless, Angelique was glad when those hot-looking little blue eyes had left her face.

"Well, good-bye, Halloran," Mr. Claybourne said, and with his stick gave the coachman the signal to drive on.

It was the next day, after she had finished her teaching session, that Angelique finally looked into the guest book. As she walked along the lower hall, she hesitated, then stopped beside the table upon which the book rested. She leafed back through recent years, then the more distant ones. 1786, 1785, 1784 . . .

Richard's bold handwriting seemed to leap up at her from the page. Under the date of September 15, 1784, he had written:

With profound thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Claybourne, whose hospitality in itself is enough to make a transatlantic voyage more than worthwhile.

Richard Lansing of Kent, England

A bit florid, perhaps. But he had been still in his early twenties then. And Mrs. Claybourne, attractive now, must have been fetching indeed ten years earlier.

Again she looked at the date, September 15, 1784. She herself had been thirteen then. Strange to think that one day, perhaps while she toiled in the wheat field under a late-afternoon sun, a young man she had never heard of stood here in a gracious hall filled with cool morning air, writing in this guest book a name that someday she herself would bear.

She wished that she had resisted the temptation to look in

this book. Now each time she passed it she would be reminded of him. Trying to think of nothing except what supper dish she would prepare for Jacques and herself, she went out the side door, crossed the south lawn, and took the path through the trees to the little house.

It was two days later that she talked with the slave woman down by the river.

She had dismissed her pupils at three o'clock, while she could still hear, through the wall between her classroom and Jacques's, the voices of the Claybourne boys declining Latin pronouns. Because she would not need to start supper for at least two hours, she walked down the long drive to the public road and turned to her left. When she came to a narrow rift, perhaps a deer track, in the trees and tangled underbrush that covered the river's sloping bank, she followed it. At the river's edge was a strip of long grass about two feet wide. She sat down and looked across the water, running silent and swift, to the opposite bank. Broad-leaved trees among the pines showed a few flecks of gold and scarlet. Soon the isolation, and the river's silent flow, induced in her an almost mesmerized state. Her mind swung back and forth in time, from the Indians who once must have slipped along this river's bank in search of game and fish, and then forward to today's session with the Claybourne girls, during which Janet had read aloud, with gestures, from John Smith's boastful account of his adventures with the Indians of Virginia. From there her thoughts went to England and her own child, no longer at Lansing Court, and deprived of both his hotheaded parents, but, thank God, safe in Elizabeth's sensible and loving care.

Children's voices. With a start, she looked to her left. A girl of about seven and a boy perhaps two years younger approached along the grassy strip. Intent upon some obscure quarrel—the girl sounding imperious, the boy defiant—they were almost upon her before they saw her. They halted, eyes wide with alarm, and then turned to run.

"Wait!" Angelique called. "Please wait. Don't be afraid."

They halted, turned back. Looking wary and yet curious, they took a few steps toward her. They were both clad in a ragged sort of shirt that reached midway of the thigh. The girl was very black, with almost classical features that reminded Angelique of drawings she had seen of Assyrian bas-reliefs. The boy's skin was yellowish. His tightly waving hair

was blond-red, and his eyes an indefinable color, neither brown nor hazel nor gray.

Mulatto. And Angelique felt sure of the father's identity.

She said, "What are your names?"

They looked at her without answering.

"My name is Angelique."

The girl said, "You don' sound lak other white folks."

"That is because I was born in France, on the other side of the ocean. Have you ever seen the ocean?"

After a moment the girl shook her head. "But I heard of it. My mammy come cross it when she was no bigger'n me."

"Think of that! Are you ready to tell me your names now?"

"I'se Cammy. This here's my brothah Jess."

The boy's face, which until now she had thought quite unattractive with its yellowish skin and strange eyes, broke into a smile, and she saw that he was beautiful.

Sound of movement along the sloping bank above them. "Cammy! Jess!" A woman's voice.

The children whirled as if to flee. Angelique said, "No, wait! If that is your mother, don't run off."

The children halted. A young woman emerged from the deer path onto the grassy strip, a woman with skin as black as Cammy's but with more rounded features. She appeared to be well into her ninth month of pregnancy, which probably explained why she was not stooping in the cotton fields with a sack dragging behind her.

At sight of Angelique she halted. Her gaze went to the boy and girl and then back to Angelique. "Is my chillun botherin' you, ma'am?" The voice was polite, but the eyes were cool and watchful.

"No, of course not. We were just getting acquainted."

"They allus comes down here. I'se skeered they drown in the river. I bes' take them home now."

But she did not move. Evidently she, like her children, was torn between wariness and curiosity. She said, "You the lady teaches the young ladies up at the big house?"

Angelique nodded.

"You teaches them to read?"

"No, they already know how to read. I teach them other things."

She became aware that a hungry look had come into

Cammy's dark face. It reminded Angelique of something that had happened years before. Suddenly she knew what it was. Herself, looking at the bookcase in the invalid Madame Ponselle's room in that Montmartre inn.

Cammy said, "Bet I could read, somebody teaches me."

Her mother said furiously, "You shut your mouf!"

Angelique said, after a moment, "But I'm sure she could. She seems . . . bright."

"Oh, she bright, all right, just like her pappy. He so bright he got hisself sold south. Mr. Halloran don' lak no uppity nigger."

Perhaps, too, after he had chosen this woman for his own bed, Mr. Halloran did not like the sight of the black man who had fathered her elder child.

"White folks hear black chile learnin' to read, even small gal lak this one, there be big trouble for her, and me, and little Jess here."

Angelique looked down at Cammy. In its bleakness her face looked wizened for a moment, almost old. Angelique's heart twisted. From her mother's own lips the child had just heard a sentence of lifelong imprisonment that was worse than imprisonment of the body.

Angelique said, aware of how inadequate it sounded, "I am sorry."

The black woman's eyes were cold and distant now. "Things is the way they is."

Angelique needed to take that distant look from the other woman's eyes. She said, "Your little boy. I have a son not much younger."

Real interest in the black woman's face now. "I don' never hear about no little boy."

"He is back in England, with a dear friend. We could not bring him with us. You see, we had almost nothing, not even our passage money. We are not bound for life like you, but we are bound for seven years, or at least until we can pay Mr. Claybourne back our passage money, plus a little more."

Dark eyes looked into blue ones. Angelique had a sense that despite all the barriers of race and culture between them, they at that moment looked at each other as woman to woman, mother to mother.

The black woman's gaze went to her son, then back to Angelique. "My name is Lena. Miz Claybourne give it to me. I

had an African name, but my mammy died soon after the ship land and my pappy was sold off, so all I remembers is Lena."

"My name is Angelique."

For a moment more they looked at each other, not smiling but with friendliness in their eyes. Then Lena said, "We has to get back. Mr. Halloran don' allow no candles in the cabins, so we gets supper before dark. Come, chillun. Come on, now."

The boy and girl threw Angelique one last wondering look and then followed their mother up the deer track to the road.

After a while Angelique realized that she, too, should be starting home, although she still had time enough to take a roundabout route. For almost half a mile she walked along that grassy strip at the river's edge. Then, finding her way barred by a granite boulder, she climbed up through the trees and undergrowth to the road. A few minutes after she turned in the direction of the main house and the cottage, she saw a footpath leading away through the trees on the right-hand side of the road. She hesitated a moment, then took it. She had always loved woodland paths. And if she kept bearing toward the near-setting sun, she would not get lost.

She passed a fern-surrounded spring bubbling up out of the ground, crossed a plank footbridge over a narrow creek, walked through an open space where tiny blue wild asters and goldenrod grew. Moments after she reentered the trees, she saw that ahead of her the path branched into a Y shape. She moved forward, intending to take the left-hand path.

Then she heard it, an odd whistling noise followed by a sharp crack, and then a sound that was like a soft moan or collective sigh. Another cracking sound, and then an agonized scream.

Heart thudding with fear, she forced herself to change direction and follow the path's right-hand branch. Here under the interlaced pine branches it was almost dark, but ahead she could see part of a large clearing bathed in sunset glow.

She stopped at the clearing's edge, inside the second line of trees. She could see it all now. The two-story clapboard house with its peeling yellow paint, the house she knew must be the overseer's, since it was far too large to be a slave cabin. The black man, lacerated back bared to the waist, hands tied to a

post. The overseer standing beside him, pistol still strapped to his waist, whip in his hand, smile of pure joy on the red face made even redder by the sunset. A few yards away from him stood a group of about a dozen black men and women. Their faces seemed to hold only a flinching terror, but Angelique sensed the hatred just beneath the surface, a hatred that was helpless and yet implacable.

Halloran drew back his arm. Once again the lash curled around the man's raw and bleeding body. Once again Angelique heard that soft moan from the spectators. This time, though, the beaten man, head falling forward, did not cry out. With concern crossing his face—that black, after all, had cost his employer good money—Halloran moved close, grasped the slave's kinky hair to pull his head back, and looked into his face. It was a very black face, scarred on the left cheek. Evidently reassured, Halloran let the man's head slump forward again.

He turned to the now silent men and women. "All right. You all saw what happened to Remus. Any of the rest of you try sneaking out of the fields just because you've got a belly-ache, the same will happen to you. Now, take Remus back to his woman. And tell the other niggers what I just said."

He dropped the whip onto the pine-needle-strewn dirt, went into the house, and closed the door. Feeling that she might be quite literally sick, she turned and fled back to where the path branched and then hurried along the other branch until she could see the roof of her cottage. So close, she thought. The house she and Jacques occupied could not be more than half a mile from the one where that overseer lived, and yet because of the thickness of the woodland, she had not realized it.

SHE DID NOT tell Jacques what she had seen. With his moral courage, his stern sense of justice, he might feel obliged to thresh out the matter with Mr. Claybourne, with the possible result that she and Jacques might have to leave their comfortable situation before they had even earned their first quarter's wages. Still, she could not evade the thought that the Claybournes should be made aware of what sort of man they employed as overseer. Finally she decided that she would talk to Mrs. Claybourne about it.

Her opportunity came two days later, when she was invited to take tea with Mrs. Claybourne in the upstairs sitting room. There Angelique spoke about Lena and her children, and then about the beating of the male slave. Her face unhappy, the older woman listened with her gaze lowered to the tablecloth.

At last she said, "Oh, my dear! I am so sorry you saw that."

"Please don't feel sorry for me, Mrs. Claybourne. In a way, I am glad I saw it, because it has enabled me to tell you what sort of man Halloran is."

After a moment Mrs. Claybourne said in a low voice, "But you see, we already knew, or at least suspected."

Angelique said, appalled, "You already knew?"

"My dear, let me try to explain. My husband is a cotton planter only because he inherited this plantation. He has never been happy with it, nor with slavery. That is why he keeps emphasizing that his real vocation is the law. But his practice would not begin to support this household. He must count on the land and the slaves for that."

"And yet he tries to keep his distance from the plantation."

"Yes, and not just because he finds slave-owning repugnant. He knows that he would be too . . . squeamish to run

the plantation successfully. And so he leaves its management almost entirely to Halloran."

"But the man is a brute!"

Mrs. Claybourne cried, "Don't you see that a brute is what is required? How else do you keep a slave working to his full capacity except through giving pain or threatening to give it? You cannot offer him increased wages. He gets no wages. If you try to bribe him with better food or clothing, it only earns him the enmity of his fellow slaves. Even with the house servants I have to be careful about that. True, the situation is a little different, because the field hands are all on one level, whereas here in the house everyone knows that Alexander and Blossom carry extra responsibilities." Alexander was the tall, light-skinned butler. Blossom, a large woman apparently of pure African descent, was the cook. "Therefore I can be more generous with them. But I am always careful to treat the housemaids all the same."

Angelique brought the conversation back to Halloran. "I fear that your overseer is more brutal than the average, and more brutal than he needs to be."

"Now, how can you say that?"

"Because of something I saw in the faces of the people he had assembled to watch the lashing."

"What was it you saw?"

Angelique hesitated. She had talked about her past and Jacques's as little as possible, saying only that he had written for newspapers but had found it impossible to continue because of the political situation, and so they had decided to emigrate. She had not even mentioned that she had been raised in a peasant household. And yet it was her childhood spent among the unjustly treated which had rendered her quick to sense in others that smoldering bitterness which could flare into reckless, even suicidal violence.

"They looked to me like people on the edge of revolt."

"My dear!" Mrs. Claybourne set her teacup down forcefully in its fragile saucer. "Never say that word. Never! It is something which we simply do not discuss."

"I see." But not discussing it, she thought, would not lessen the possibility of it.

"And about that little boy you think is Halloran's. Miscegenation is another thing we do not discuss." Bitterness came

into her voice. "At least we ladies don't. I am sure the men discuss it frequently, and with relish."

After a moment she went on, "Having said that much, I had better explain what I mean. Even though we white women don't discuss miscegenation, it is for us one of the ugliest facts of slavery. How painful it must be to see, running about one's plantation, slave children who are obviously the half brothers and sisters of one's own children.

"Not," she added, "that that has been my situation. I am certain that my husband has never visited the slave cabins. His grandmother, though, was not so fortunate in that respect."

When Angelique looked at her in puzzled silence, Mrs. Claybourne said, "There can be no harm in telling you. I am sure that everyone in the county knows it, even though, as I said, we women do not discuss it." She paused. "Has it struck you that Alexander . . . resembled someone?"

Angelique thought of the white-haired butler with his tall leanness, his gravely courteous manner. If his skin was lighter, if his hair was gray-blond rather than white . . .

Mrs. Claybourne evidently had read comprehension in Angelique's eyes, because she said, "That is right. My husband and Alexander are first cousins, and played together here on this plantation as young children. Alexander is an intelligent man. I suspect that long ago he taught himself to read, although he has been far too wily to let anyone catch him at it."

She smiled at Angelique. "And now, my dear, let us leave this whole distasteful subject. Tell me about my daughters. Has their spelling improved?"

As fall gave way to early winter, the brutal episode she had witnessed in the woods faded to the back of her mind, but she did not entirely forget it. Late on Christmas Day the slaves flocked up to the main house so that Mr. Claybourne, standing on the rear porch, could hand out presents to the field workers—Jew's harps for men over fifteen, four yards of bright calico for women over fourteen and candy for the children. After dark there was a fireworks display. Fireworks at Christmas was a southern custom, Mrs. Claybourne told Angelique.

Still later a bonfire was kindled. Some of the slaves played

Jew's harps while black children and even a few grown-ups danced in the ruddy glow of the fire. The others clapped hands in time to the music. For this part of the festivities Halloran had appeared. Neatly garbed in dark blue coat and breeches, he stood apart from both the slaves and the group gathered on the porch, which consisted of the Claybournes and Jacques and Angelique and the household staff.

Everywhere Angelique saw smiles, revealing teeth brilliantly white in contrast to dark faces. With surprise she saw that one of the dancers, a young man with a scarred cheek, was the same one who had been beaten almost to the point of death in the woods that day. Could it be that the apologists for slavery were right? Were these black people really just children? Children who needed the firmest sort of hand to keep them at work? Children who would forget their grievances if they were given a day off from work, and gimcrack presents, and a whole chicken to cook for Christmas dinner instead of just wings and backs?

Then she saw that not everyone was smiling. A man near the left-hand end of the porch was looking at Halloran while the overseer gazed with a genial expression at the dancers. The black man's face held a look of such implacable hatred that Angelique felt a cold chill run down her spine.

The brief southern winter passed, gave way to daffodils and forsythia on the wide lawns, and blue-flowered hepatica in the woods. Almost every ship arriving in Newport News from England brought a letter from Elizabeth. Rick was well, each letter said, and growing rapidly. A letter in late March, though, carried disturbing news about Richard. The elderly cousin who employed him as steward seemed to be fatally ill. Since the cousin's eldest son, who of course would inherit the estate, had another man in mind for the position of steward, Richard's future was now in doubt.

For a long time after Jacques went to sleep that night, she lay awake and thought of Richard—proud, even arrogant Richard—writing to men he had once entertained at Lansing Court or in his London house. "It seems," she could imagine him writing, "that I am to get the sack. Now, if you or anyone you know should feel the urge to hire an expert equestrian, or piquet player, or even an estate steward . . ."

Suppressing sobs, lest she disturb the man beside her, Angelique let the tears roll down her cheeks.

As the spring days lengthened into those of summer, though, she found her mind dwelling somewhat less on Richard. Sometimes she would realize with surprise that twenty-four hours had passed without her thinking of him. Soon, perhaps, she would be able to give Jacques not just her affection, but the total devotion he deserved.

One June night, as they sat at supper in their cottage, she said, "How long do you think it will take us to earn enough so that we can leave the Claybournes? I mean, enough to repay the passage money and start our own school?"

"At least another year, I am afraid."

"Perhaps we should stay longer than that, so that we can earn more money. That way, even before we start our school, we can go back to France and . . . and regularize our union. No one here in America need ever know that we were not married all the time."

From the way his face lit up, she knew how her words had gladdened him. She went on, "And it would be safe enough to go back to France now."

Yes, safe enough. The Terror had ended months before, when the tyrant Robespierre and his closest associates, like so many before them, had been beheaded by the guillotine.

He came around to her end of the table, tilted her face upward, and kissed her. "Yes, my darling. We will go. I shall write to a Paris lawyer I know and ask him how much it will cost to arrange the dissolution of your marriage to . . . the dissolution of your former marriage."

Despite the onset of hot weather, the Claybourne boys were kept at their books. But from early June on the girls were dismissed from their classroom at two in the afternoon. Angelique liked the arrangement. Now she had more time to spend keeping the little house in order, or reading, or strolling beside the river and watching the eddies swirl over its otherwise calm surface. She did not again encounter the slave woman Lena or her children. Perhaps Halloran somehow had learned of that meeting and ordered that it not be repeated. Whatever the reason, she could sit there in unbroken solitude for hours, feeling that sense of quiet contentment grow strong within her.

And then, one afternoon in early July, she descended the

stairs from the classroom and was about to turn down the hall to the side door when Mr. Claybourne and another man emerged from his study and started across the hall to the library. The man turned his head toward her.

He was Richard. Older-looking, quieter-looking, and with flecks of gray at the temples, but still Richard.

She stopped in her tracks. She knew in that moment that her heart had not changed in the slightest. It was as if only hours had passed since they had slaked their desire for each other on that bed in the inn a few miles from Paris, only hours since she had hurled that wineglass at him, only hours since they had looked at each other through the dawn light and said their painful farewell.

Mr. Claybourne said, "Oh, Mrs. Latour!" Hand on Richard's arm, he walked toward her. "May I present Sir Richard Lansing? He is to be our houseguest for a few weeks, or for longer, if we can persuade him. Mrs. Latour teaches our two girls, Sir Richard, and her husband tries to drum Latin and Greek and mathematics into the heads of our boys."

Face white and unsmiling, Richard bowed. Afterward Angelique could never remember what she said or did. She only knew that after an interval she went out the side door, crossed the lawn, and entered the path through the woods. Oh, God, how foolish she had been! Why had she not realized that if Richard had been a guest of the Claybournes' once, he might be again? If she had asked Elizabeth to advise him where she was, the Claybourne plantation in all probability would have been the last place on earth he would have visited. But now he had come here, shattering to bits her sense of growing peace and contentment.

She was sitting motionless in the small parlor about half an hour later when someone knocked. She opened the door and said, "Come in, Richard."

They sat near the unlighted fireplace. As they looked at each other, it seemed to her that the air vibrated with all the emotions they had shared, passion and bitterness and sorrow. He said, "Believe me, I had no idea you were here. I never asked Elizabeth exactly where you were, and she never volunteered the information."

She nodded. "I could tell from your face a few minutes ago that you did not know."

"I suppose you wondered how it is that I came here."
Again she nodded.

"The cousin who employed me as his steward died."

"Elizabeth mentioned in one of her letters that he was ill."

"Perhaps because he knew that his heir would not continue to hire me, he left me a legacy. It is not enough to be of much use to me in England. But Mr. Claybourne assured me that I am right in believing that only a day or two's ride from here, toward the Appalachians, one can still buy land very cheaply."

"And that is what you intend to do?"

"Yes. It is not just for myself, Angelique. I thought that after I was established I might have my . . . our son brought over here. He is getting to the age where he needs other guidance than that of a spinster, however competent and loving."

Angelique was not sure of that. Nevertheless, she remained silent.

"He will need me, or he will need someone like your . . . like Jacques. As I once told you, I will never try to deny you parenthood of our son. Perhaps later on we can talk about it."

Angelique nodded.

He said, "The Claybournes seem to have no doubt that you two are husband and wife."

"No, I don't think they do."

"In the library Mr. Claybourne not only told me you lived in this cottage. He told me that he felt fortunate indeed to have teachers like you for his children. He seems especially impressed with Jacques. In fact, all I can conclude after talking with Mr. Claybourne is that your Frenchman is even a better man than I had thought."

"Of course he is a fine man!"

"And you are happy with him?"

She wanted to say: Perhaps I would have been, in time, if you had not come here. Instead she just nodded.

After an interval Richard said quietly, "If you like, Angelique, I will stay at the inn in Newport News while I am searching for a suitable property. I had hoped to avoid the expense. Yes, my funds are that low. I had hoped, too, that with Mr. Claybourne's constant advice I would find the right

sort of land more quickly. But if you think it best, I will decline the Claybournes' hospitality."

"No. What excuse could you give for declining, once you have accepted?" Besides, she thought, the sooner you find a place—preferably one at a considerable distance from here—the better it will be for all three of us.

He said, "Very well." Then, after a moment: "I suppose I had best go now."

"I suppose you should." Suddenly she felt she dared not let him look into her eyes.

He got to his feet. "Good-bye, Angelique," he said in that same quiet voice. "No, don't bother. I can let myself out."

She was in the small kitchen two hours later, stripping the husks from what she had learned to call sweet corn rather than maize, when Jacques came in. One swift glance told her that his face was pale and that his dark blue eyes, because of their distended pupils, looked even darker than usual.

She said, "You are late."

"Yes. I went for a long walk." Then: "You know that Richard Lansing is here, don't you?"

She nodded.

"You talked with him?"

"Yes. He is going to buy land. Not in tidewater Virginia," she added quickly. "He has little money, and land here is expensive. He is going to look farther west, toward the Appalachians."

Jacques's voice was dry. "I wonder how long it will take him to find that land?"

"Not long, surely. And even while he is at the Claybournes', you and I will see little of him if he is to be out looking for land every day. Oh, Jacques! Please don't . . ."

She broke off. He said, "Don't worry? But, my darling, how can I help it?" His words sounded as if they came from a painfully constricted throat. "You see, you are my whole life."

She ran to him and threw her arms around his neck. "Jacques! Don't look like that. I will never leave you. Never."

He held her close. "His coming changes nothing?"

"Nothing."

"You still feel that we should marry as soon as we can?"

"Of course, although marriage could not make me feel more bound to you than I am now."

And she did feel bound, not just by affection, but by gratitude. And although it might have sounded strange to anyone who knew she lived with Jacques out of wedlock, she felt bound to him by honor.

Apparently Richard began his search for land immediately, because during the next few days she caught only two fleeting glimpses of him. Both times she had looked out of the classroom window and seen him riding off through the morning light on one of the Claybournes' saddle horses.

One evening near the end of the week Jacques told her that he'd had a conversation with Richard in a hallway of the main house that afternoon.

Nerves tightening, Angelique asked, "What did you say to each other?"

"He asked how I liked Virginia. I said I found it very pleasant. I asked him if he had found any suitable land. He said that as yet he had not. Then we bade each other good afternoon, and went our own ways."

He added wryly, "I suppose that now that we have disposed of those amenities, we will just nod to each other from now on whenever we meet."

She said after a moment, "Do you realize, Jacques, that Richard has great respect for you?"

"And I for him, damn it all. Oh, I wish to God that he had never been born. But I know that it took courage and generosity for him to leave a comfortable life in England so as to get that young woman out of the Conciergerie. No matter what, one has to respect him for that."

When Richard had been at the Claybournes' about ten days, Angelique and Jacques were invited to supper in the main house. Unable to find an excuse, they accepted. Angelique found it uncomfortable indeed, sitting there with a man who was her legal husband and another man with whom she not only lived now but also had lived with in the past.

Mr. Claybourne, obviously unaware of the room's tension, led the table talk. It centered around Richard's search for land. Richard said that although he had ranged far afield, even spending four nights wrapped in a blanket at the roadside so as to extend his search farther west, he had not yet found anything suitable except for a parcel of forty acres.

"That is much too small," Mr. Claybourne said. "You must start out with at least a hundred acres if you are to have

what you told me you wanted, a subsistence crop and a money tobacco crop. If you have too little land, you waste your own efforts as well as the labor of the slaves you will hire from me."

Richard said, "I understand that." Almost certainly he too felt tense and uncomfortable, and perhaps as a result became overtalkative. Whatever the reason, he went on, "Speaking of slaves, a man I met on the road the other day told me that there had been a slave uprising at a plantation about fifty miles south of here. No one was killed, but the overseer was wounded with his own pistol after the slaves had wrestled it away from him. Then they set fire to several buildings. After that the slaves—there were five of them involved—disappeared into the woods. The man who told me about it didn't know whether or not they had been caught yet."

A strained silence lengthened. Then Mr. Claybourne said, "Rumors, Sir Richard, rumors! And even if they were true . . . well, you could not be expected to realize this, but we are careful when and where we talk of such matters. What if one of the serving maids had been in the room when you told that story? It might have spread to the field hands."

"I am sorry, sir."

"Don't be sorry. You could not have known. And anyway, I suppose it would not really matter if my field hands did hear the story. *They* are not apt to turn on their overseer. Halloran is a stern disciplinarian, but just. I feel he has the respect and even the affection of the field hands."

All through the meal Angelique and Richard had avoided each other's gaze, but now their eyes met briefly. In his eyes she read the dismayed conviction that their host was deliberately deceiving himself. Had Richard witnessed some evidence of Halloran's brutality? Or was it just that Richard, too, had seen how the deprived and exploited could rise up and wreak bloody revenge? Perhaps he too had grown sensitive enough to feel a threat of violence in the air, like the peculiar smell of thunderstorms that boiled up repeatedly in the hot southern Virginia summer.

The days continued smotheringly warm. Mrs. Claybourne decreed that until the weather broke the girls would have only before-noon classes. Then, one morning in August, Angelique found that she was to have no classes at all that day. Mrs. Claybourne, pale with worry, met her in the ground-

floor hall of the main house and told her that both girls were ill. "They have fever and complain of headaches. I have sent to town for the doctor."

Angelique returned to the cottage. All morning, despite the heat, she polished furniture with beeswax and washed windows. Feeling oddly apprehensive, she wished that Jacques was coming home for his midday meal. She knew, though, that he would have his dinner as usual with the boys in the schoolroom.

Early in the afternoon she set out through the woods. Weeks before she had discovered, along one of the paths, an especially attractive spring, with a mossy bank sloping down to where the water bubbled clear and sweet-smelling. It would be cool there, and she always felt soothed by the sight of the bubbling water and the faint musical sound it made.

She had been sitting there about ten minutes when she heard someone approaching through the trees on the other side of the spring. Nerves tightening, she sprang to her feet. The clapboard house Halloran occupied was only about a hundred yards from here . . .

The crackle of footsteps through underbrush grew louder. Then Richard emerged from the trees and stopped short. They stared at each other in silence broken only by the spring's faint bubbling sound and, in the distance, a blue jay's raucous call.

At last he said, "I did not ride out today with Mr. Claybourne. He is not feeling well."

"Neither are his daughters."

They looked at each other for another silent moment. Then he said, "I am sorry to have intruded upon you," and turned away.

"No, wait!" He turned back. "There is something I should have told you the day you came here, something that has been on my mind ever since. It is about my brother. About his death, I mean."

She could tell by the look in his eyes that he was turning his mind back over what must seem to him, also, like half a lifetime, back to the day his black hunter had leaped the wall into that wheat field.

"You did not kill Claude—purposely, accidentally, or in any other way."

She told him, then, of how Marcel Monet had boasted of his brutal and cowardly act.

After a silence Richard said, "I am glad I did not cause the boy's death. But knowing that I did not does not change anything else." Pain tightened his voice. "Oh, God, if it only could! If only I could suddenly learn that I did not do any of those things that, bit by bit, widened the breach between us until we could not reach across it. If only, that night in that tavern in Montmartre—"

"Please, Richard!" Tears were crowding her throat. "We both have said and done foolish, wicked things. There is no use in talking about them. I just wanted you to know that at least you did not cause Claude's . . ."

Her voice caught on a sob. She turned and, tear-blinded, started toward the path. Something—perhaps a vine, perhaps only an unevenness in the ground—tripped her, and she fell forward onto the pine-needle-strewn earth.

Richard was beside her, lifting her to her feet, brushing the hair back from her face, looking anxiously down at her. "Oh, darling! Are you hurt?"

"No."

She looked up into the dark face so close above her own. Everything else faded out—the sound of the spring, the smell of sun-warmed pines, even the heat-hazed sky—and she was aware only of the man who held her. Then his mouth, warm and demanding, came down upon hers. Her arms went around his neck. She knew that she was lost, lost and drowning, in the tide of desire sweeping through her, desire that time had not weakened.

He raised his head and looked somberly down at her. "Angelique?"

"Yes, Richard. Oh, God, yes."

"Your house?"

"Yes."

They moved along the path to the cottage, up the box staircase. In the small second bedroom they lay naked on the four-poster bed. Caressing all of her with hands and lips and tongue, he brought her from that first sense of inward melting to a state of such hungry tension that she moaned for release. Then, long body weighting hers, he carried her thrust by thrust to a shattering, exquisite climax.

When at last they lay side by side, bodies shining with per-

spiration in the afternoon light, she asked despairingly, "Will we ever get over wanting each other like this?"

"Eventually." His voice held grim humor. "In fifty or sixty years, say."

After a long silence she said, "Strange. What we have just done makes me feel like an adulteress. And yet you, not Jacques, are my husband."

"No, not really. I have never been much to you except a lover. Jacques has been your husband. Do you know where that word comes from, my dearest? It comes from the verb to husband, meaning to tend and protect and care for. Except for that time when he had to leave you alone in Paris, he has given you tenderness and protection. I have never protected you, not even against myself."

"And yet I love you. Oh, Richard! Tell me what that is."

"I don't know. I just know that I love you too."

"Do you realize that you never said that to me until today?"

"But you must have known it."

"Yes, I think so. I guess I have known that you loved me, in your way."

He propped his dark head on one elbow and looked down at her, not touching her. "Perhaps I will always love you, as well as desire you. I hope not, but perhaps I will. One thing I know for certain."

Her eyes questioned him.

"I am leaving here as soon as I can. I promised to ride out with Mr. Claybourne two days from now to look at some land, but after that, I will leave. If I stay here I will not be able to keep my hands off you, not after this. And I have lost the right to you. Or perhaps we have lost the right to each other. Anyway, I shall go, perhaps to the inn at Newport News. Or perhaps I shall rent a room from a tobacco planter who lives about eight miles from here, and whose land near the Appalachians I may buy. Anyway, I shall leave."

She ached to reach up and draw his face down to hers, but she did not. She said painfully, "Yes, my darling, don't let us torture each other. Please, please go."

When he had left her, she lay there for a while in the early-afternoon stillness. How she wished she could tell Jacques what had happened! He would forgive her. She had no doubt on that score. But she would be easing her con-

science at the expense of his pain. That she could not do to him, and so she would bear her guilt in silence.

After a while she got up and went into the other bedroom, hers and Jacques's. She poured cool water into the basin and bathed her body, which, less than an hour before, had quivered with ecstasy in Richard's embrace. Pray God he really would leave in about forty-eight hours. And pray God that in the meantime they did not meet again.

But Richard did not leave when he planned to, because by then the Claybourne household needed all the help it could get, including his.

42

THE MORNING OF the day she expected Richard to leave, she accompanied Jacques over to the main house, on the chance that the girls had recovered sufficiently from their indisposition to resume their lessons. As she had hoped, she had not encountered Richard again since they had parted in the spare room of the cottage, although she had caught one distant glimpse of him.

She and Jacques entered by the side door and walked along the narrow corridor to the wide entrance hall. A gray-haired man, short, stout, and very worried-looking, was coming down the stairs. The black bag in his hand told Angelique that he must be the doctor from Newport News.

He stopped in front of them. "Mr. and Mrs. Latour?"

Jacques said, "That is right."

"I am Dr. Dalrymple, and I fear I must press you into service. I had hoped against hope that the Claybourne girls did not have what I suspected. But this morning the symptoms are unmistakable. It is typhoid. What is more, Mr. Claybourne and four of the house servants are complaining of headaches and fever."

Typhoid. Angelique shuddered inwardly. In La Fabrique

she had heard talk of epidemics that had swept through the prison. The vomiting and diarrhea. The "rose spots" on abdomen and chest. The extremely high fever that could cause raving delirium. The high incidence of death.

Evidently the doctor feared that they would flee the stricken house, because he said rapidly, "I very much need your help. I cannot stay here. At other plantations there are cases of what I fear may be typhoid. And even if I could stay, I would be only one pair of hands. The sick not only need nursing. Since the cook is among the servants who are ill, someone else must prepare the food, or at least supervise its preparation. Mrs. Claybourne, who is not a strong woman, will have her hands full just nursing her daughters."

Jacques and Angelique looked at each other. He said, "We will stay, Dr. Dalrymple."

The doctor's face seemed to crumple with relief. "Good. You two are obviously young and strong, as is the English gentleman. With you here, I will feel much more hopeful about this particular household." He paused and then went on, "The Englishman—I believe his name is Sir Richard Langley—"

"Lansing," Angelique said in a constricted voice.

"Ah, yes. He told me he had planned to leave today. But of course he saw instantly how much he was needed. He is with Mr. Claybourne now."

Angelique asked, still in that constricted voice, "Just what is it you want us to do for the patients?"

The doctor made a despairing gesture. "Since we do not know the cause of this type of fever, we have no idea of what sort of medicine to use against it. All we are sure of is that the disease passes from person to person. And all we can do is to let the illness run its course, while in the meantime keeping the patient as clean and comfortable as possible. But even that involves almost constant attention.

"As for running the household," he went on, "perhaps you could do that, Mrs. Latour. Eight of the house servants, including the butler, are still well. Mrs. Claybourne tells me that any of the maids who are still well would be suitable for duty in the kitchen. As for you, Mr. Latour, I wish you would keep looking in on the house-slave cabins. I suggested to Mrs. Claybourne that both the Claybourne boys, since they seem quite well, could help see to it that the stricken servants

have fresh water and cold compresses to bring down the fever. She became almost hysterical over the idea. She is terrified that her sons, too, will come down with the disease."

Again Angelique and Jacques looked at each other. His face was rather pale, and she was sure that her own must be too. Then he turned to the doctor and said, "We will do our best."

It was the start of a prolonged nightmare. No sooner had Angelique selected one of the housemaids to help her in the kitchen than the woman developed headache and fever, and within a few days was lying delirious in one of the slave cabins a hundred yards behind the house. The same thing happened with her second helper. After that she did all the cooking herself, making soups and custards to be carried to the ill, and broiled meats and vegetables for the still-healthy members of the household—Jacques and herself, Richard, the two Claybourne boys, and Mrs. Claybourne, who grew steadily paler and thinner but did not develop fever.

When Angelique was not in the kitchen or trying to maintain minimum standards of order in other parts of the house, she helped nurse the sick, both in the main house and in the cabins. So that she and Jacques would not waste time going to their cottage to sleep, they took over a room on the ground floor, near the side entrance to the house. Moving between the kitchen and the sickrooms, hearing the groans of those afflicted with abdominal pain and the ravings of those gripped by high fever, Angelique lost all track of the days. Sometimes she found herself unsure, as she glanced at a window with blue-grayness beyond it, whether the light was that of early morning or evening.

She saw Richard, of course, at the sketchy meals eaten in the dining room. And again and again they passed each other as they hurried along hallways or to and from the slave cabins. But they were so tired that they exchanged only faint smiles, if that.

Three weeks passed. Angelique knew it was three weeks, because the doctor told her so. Otherwise she might have thought it was three months. The cook and a housemaid had died by then. The Claybournes' younger daughter, Carrie, was convalescent, although still too weak to leave her bed. But her sister, Janet, never again would toss her curls coquettishly or recite with gestures Portia's speech to the court.

Even before the brief burial ceremony in the Claybournes' private cemetery, the grief in Mrs. Claybourne's eyes for her daughter was mingled with terror for her sons, because by that time both of them were sick.

And so was Jacques. Stubbornly he had maintained that his headache was the result only of strain, until the morning when he awoke too feverish and weak to leave their temporary room in the main house.

Angelique found a narrow bed in the attic and had a manservant set it up in her room and Jacques's. She spent every moment possible with him, leaving the scullery maid and the housemaids unsupervised so that she could keep bathing his fevered body. At night, when his fever always soared even higher, she lay on the narrow bed beside the double one and listened to his delirium. Most of the time he seemed to think he was back in Paris. She heard the names of men she vaguely remembered from his accounts of Assembly meetings that winter when she had lived with him in that top-floor room on the Left Bank. And she heard her own name again and again. By the end of another five days he was in a state which the doctor told her was usual for that stage of the disease, his tongue dry and brown, his abdomen swollen, his delirium almost constant.

One night, unable to bear the sound of that raving voice a moment longer, she fled down the side hall to the main one and then through the front door, which, on this hot night, stood open. A few moments after she stepped out onto the pillared porch and leaned against the house facade, she became aware of the shrilling of katydids. Katydids meant late September. Was it still only late September? It must be.

Someone stepped out onto the porch. She turned her head and saw, by the light of the oil wall sconces spilling out into the darkness, that it was Richard.

He said after a moment, "I suppose it all becomes a little too much for you once in a while."

"Yes." Then, with an effort: "The ones you are caring for, how are they?"

"Three more of the servants are dead. The boys are both extremely ill, but then, with them the disease is at its height. Mr. Claybourne is recovering, but he is still so weak that that butler of his has to spoon broth into his mouth."

He paused, and then went on, "This morning Mr. Clay-

bourne asked me to make sure that the field hands were still disease-free. I rode out to the fields. That ruffian Halloran assured me that there is not a single case. God help those poor devils if they do get sick. He will prefer to assume they are malingering, and he will whip them into the fields as long as they can stand on their feet."

After a moment he added, "Several of the field hands were close enough to hear our conversation. I could sense their gladness at news of how severely this household has been stricken. Perhaps they are disappointed that the man who owns them has not died. You can scarcely blame them. Claybourne is a decent man, but a weak one. He turns his head so that he won't know that his overseer is doing things that he himself would not do."

He fell silent for a moment, and then asked, "How is Jacques?"

"I am not sure." Fear tightened her throat. "Dr. Dalrymple says that if he gets through this week, he probably will recover."

"I hope he does, Angelique. I would pray for him if I thought my prayers would be . . . acceptable," he said, and she knew from the sober tone of his voice that he meant it.

For a while there was no sound except the shrilling of the katydids. Then he said, looking at her through the refracted glow of the light from the doorway, "You look terrible."

"I know. So do you." He had lost weight, and his face was so pale beneath its sun-browned skin that he had a muddy color.

She went on, "We are both worn to the bone, and yet we do not get sick."

He smiled. "Perhaps it is because we are both jailbirds. Perhaps in prison we became both exposed and hardened to about every disease there is."

She returned his smile. "You may be right. Well, I will go back to Jacques now."

She awoke one morning from exhausted sleep to see Jacques lying motionless in the other bed. His head was turned toward her, and his eyes were clear and sane in his emaciated face. He said weakly, "Hello, Angelique."

"Oh, Jacques, Jacques!" She got out of bed and bent over him. She felt his dry, cool forehead. "Oh, my darling. The fever has broken. You are going to be all right."

When a weary Dr. Dalrymple visited Jacques two days later, he confirmed her opinion. "He will be weak for at least ten more days, but he seems out of danger. He may have a few pains in his joints, though, and therefore a certain difficulty in sleeping. I shall give you laudanum to administer in case he cannot sleep."

Then he looked at the window, frowning. A tall rosebush, still in leaf, stood outside it, cutting off light and air, so that even at ten in the morning the room was dim. He said, "Mrs. Latour, your husband would recover faster in more cheerful surroundings. Is there not an upstairs bedroom available?"

"I am afraid not. As you know, all of the Claybourne children are now in separate rooms, so that they can be as undisturbed as possible. Sir Richard occupies a room. And the two remaining rooms, connecting rooms, are occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Claybourne. Even Mr. Claybourne's dressing room is filled. Alexander sleeps there so that he can attend Mr. Claybourne whenever it becomes necessary."

"Alexander is the butler?"

"Yes." And Mr. Claybourne's cousin and childhood playmate as well, she added mentally.

Jacques said, in a voice that had grown stronger during the past two days, "Let me move back to the cottage. I can look after myself to a certain extent now. And I would be much more content there."

After a moment Dr. Dalrymple said, "Then that is where you should be."

That afternoon two menservants carried Jacques on a litter improvised from a blanket and two poles along the woodland path to the cottage and up the box staircase to his bedroom and Angelique's. She noticed that as soon as he was installed in the bed in the familiar, sun-flooded room, he looked not only happier but also stronger.

Because she was needed as much as ever in the main house, Angelique continued to spend her nights in that ground-floor room. Three times a day she carried meals over to Jacques and sat with him while he ate. Those trips to the cottage were a further drain on her energy, of course, but she did not mind. It was good to see Jacques growing stronger day by day, even though, as the doctor had warned might be the case, he was often plagued in the evening by rheumatic-like pains, a not unusual aftermath of the fever. Too, she

liked those three brief escapes each day from the main house with its atmosphere of strain, its servants who obviously feared they too would fall ill, its cries from the upstairs rooms where the Claybourne boys lay, as delirious and emaciated as Jacques had been not long before. Too—and she was ashamed of this—she liked to escape the sight of the terror in Mrs. Claybourne's face. Once more it was a terror, not just for her sons, but for her husband. He had recovered from the fever only to succumb, as often happened, to pneumonia.

One presence in the main house, though, helped to sustain her. Each time she saw Richard, looking thin and tired but calm as he carried sheets for cold compresses into the boys' rooms, or pots of soup to the slave quarters, she somehow felt comforted and strengthened.

On the fifth day after Jacques had been moved back to the cottage, though, she awoke feeling a nameless unease. Afraid that Jacques was feeling unwell again and had somehow communicated that information to her, she hurried to the cottage with his breakfast of porridge and milk as soon as she could. He appeared not only cheerful but visibly stronger than the day before. Nevertheless that sense of oppression continued. As she worked in the kitchen and carried trays up and down stairs, she kept expecting to hear ill-tidings—that one of the Claybourne boys, who both had been on the mend, had relapsed, or that the fluid crowding Mr. Claybourne's lungs had finally choked him to death.

The day lengthened, a hot day with a lowering sky. Richard, during a brief encounter in the lower hall, told her that the boys were still improving. Mrs. Claybourne, emerging from her husband's room with a wan smile on her face, reported that although her husband was still only semi-conscious, his breathing was easier. Still Angelique felt weighted by that nameless dread.

At seven she took Jacques's supper to him through the early dark. Even though October was well advanced now, the night was almost as hot as midsummer, and the air thrummed with insect voices. She placed Jacques's meal of roast chicken and boiled squash on his bed table. As he picked up his knife and fork, she saw him wince slightly.

She cried, "What is it?"

He looked at her in surprise. "Why, it was just a rheumatic

pain, no worse than others I've had. The doctor told me to expect them. What is the trouble, Angelique? Is anyone worse over at the main house?"

"No, on the contrary."

"Then why do you seem so . . . nervous?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it is just the accumulated strain of the past weeks. About your pains. I had best pour out some laudanum for you to take as soon as you have finished your supper. That way you will be sure to sleep."

He nodded. "Yes, that would be a good idea."

After a while she walked back through the woods. Something had changed in the last half-hour. Finally she realized what it was. The darkness around her was now silent, with every insect stilled, as if the night were holding its breath. That meant nothing, she told herself. Often on hot nights the chorus of insects ceased for varying periods. Nevertheless, she quickened her pace as she moved along the last of the woodland path and across the lawn.

At the side door she somehow felt impelled to turn around and look back. Then she stood motionless.

A wavering glow rose from somewhere in the dark woods to cast a sullen reflection on the lowering night sky. Fire! For a terrible moment she thought the cottage she had just left was in flames. Then she realized that the fire was farther away.

Halloran's house, then. That clapboard house set in a clearing where the overseer had whipped a man almost to death.

Where was Halloran now?

Something moved, there beyond the lawn, a darker shape against the darkness of the trees. From the corner of her eye she caught other movement. Her gaze darted right and left, seeing more shadows detach themselves from the trees and move toward her, seeing here and there a detail of lighter shade—a face less black than the rest, or a pale-colored shirt, or the dull gleam of a weapon in a black hand.

So it was these figures, slipping through the woods while she herself moved unknowingly along the path, who had caused all the insects to fall silent.

In the paralyzed moment before she was able to turn, she knew why Halloran's house was on fire, and what had happened to him, and what was about to happen to this house and to its stricken and helpless occupants.

She whirled, jerked the door open. She heard a thudding sound, and from the corner of her eye saw a knife, its handle still quivering, its blade embedded in the doorframe. She plunged through the doorway, closed the door, shoved the bolt into place. Heart hammering, she fled down the wide corridor, turned into the main hall. At its end she shot the double bolts on the heavy front door. Now she felt she could spare the breath to scream, and so as she raced toward the stairs she cried Richard's name.

She was halfway up the first flight when he appeared on the landing. "Angelique! What is it?"

"The field hands! They've set fire to Halloran's house. And now they've come here."

Richard whirled around, ran. She followed, knowing that he must be heading for the gun room at the end of the upstairs hall. She had never been in it, although once, when Mr. Claybourne had unlocked its door, she had seen pistols and muskets resting in brackets on the walls. Richard grasped the doorknob, then turned to her. "It's locked! Do you know where the key . . . ?"

She stook her head. No sound from outside the house. She could imagine the dark figures huddled together, conferring as to the best way of breaking in.

Richard said, "Ask Alexander! He's in Claybourne's room." He stepped back, ran sidewise at the door, rammed it with his shoulder.

Angelique darted across the hall, burst into the sick man's room. Alexander was bent over the patient. He straightened and turned a surprised face toward her.

"Where is the key to the gun room?"

"Why, I don't know, ma'am. Mr. Claybourne keeps it hid. He don't tell us people where it is, not even me."

She looked down at the sick man's flushed face, at the slitted lids revealing rolled-back eyes. "Mr. Claybourne! Mr. Claybourne!"

"Ma'am, he can't hear you."

"Then help break down the door to the gun room!" From somewhere below came the sound of shattering glass, of ax blows rending wood. "Do you hear that? The field hands are breaking in! They've set fire to Halloran's house and almost certainly murdered him, and now they're breaking in here."

To her astonishment, she saw leap into his eyes a joy so pure, so fierce, that her heart quailed.

Nevertheless, after a moment she was able to say, "No matter what you or . . . or those others feel, you must help protect us. You cannot let them slaughter a sick man, and his wife, and his sick children. After all . . ."

She had been about to say: "Those children are of your blood, too." But some instinct warned her not to.

His gaze went to the unconscious man's face. In his own face she saw a strange blend of affection, sadness, and bitterness. What was he remembering—some incident from the time when he and his cousin were so young that they still were allowed to play together?

"You must help!" she cried. "You must!" She could hear, through the sound of more ax blows, more shattering glass, the thud of Richard's shoulder against that locked door.

Alexander turned his face toward her, and she knew by his expression that the balance of his emotional scales had tipped, one way or the other. Swiftly he moved past her. She followed in time to see him ram his own shoulder against that resistant door.

She became aware that Mrs. Claybourne was out in the hall, eyes distended, hand clutching her dressing gown together at the throat. Plainly terror had struck her dumb.

"Get back in your room!" Angelique said. "Lock your door."

Moving like a sleepwalker, the woman obeyed.

A crash. For a moment Angelique thought that the gun-room door had burst open. Then she realized that the sound was from downstairs. The gun-room door was yielding, though. She saw it buckling under the impact of the men's shoulders. They moved back, ran at it again. With a sound of splintering wood, it flew open.

Pounding of feet in the ground-floor hall now. She leaned against the wall, hand at her throat. The tall brown man and the even taller white one emerged from the gun room. Both men carried double-barreled pistols in each hand. They ran to the stair landing.

"Stop right there!" Richard shouted. "If you don't, eight of you are going to be dead in the next five seconds."

Sick with fear, and yet irresistibly drawn, Angelique moved to where she could look down over the railing. There were

only about twenty invaders, most of them still down in the hall. Several, though, had taken a few steps up the stairs. Why not more of them? she thought with a kind of weird detachment as she stared at the upturned sullen faces, at the weapons in their hands—hatchets and axes and knives—gleaming in the light from the wall sconces. Not even the slave she had seen whipped into unconsciousness was there. Were most of the plantation's more than one hundred male field hands too broken in spirit to rebel?

She heard Alexander's voice, speaking with a thick African accent she never before had heard him use. "You boys outen yo' mines? Now, tell me, you sets fire to Halloran's house? You kills that white man?"

There was silence. Then someone back in the crowd called, "He daid, all right. We kills him with an ax and then we looks for his gun but cain't find it. So we sets fire to his house and comes here."

"Then you sho' damn fools. Now, you get outta here and head no'thwest." He added, no longer in that slurred dialect, "If any of you ain't too stupid to know where northwest is." There was contempt in his words, but not in his voice, only pain. "If you can reach a place called Pennsylvania—do you understand that? Penn-syl-vania—you may find some people called Quakers who will help you. Otherwise you are going to hang, sure."

"Now, get out of here," Richard added. "Angelique, bring us two muskets from the gun room, so that when we've finished with the pistols . . ."

But already the invaders had turned. They surged along the wide entrance hall, slowly at first, then in panicky haste, and disappeared through the shattered front door into the night.

She saw both the men beside her lower their weapons. After several seconds she heard Richard say, "I would thank you, on my behalf and this lady's, except that I suspect you did not do it for us."

Alexander inclined his head. "You are right, sir. I did it for those ignorant field hands. I did not want to see them hung. And I did it for . . . I did it for Mr. Claybourne."

After a moment he went on, "I am sure there is no danger now. They will put as much distance between themselves and this house as possible before daylight. Excuse me now, ma'am and sir. I must go back to Mr. Claybourne." He went to the

gun room, emerged without the pistols, and then went to his master's room and closed the door behind him.

Richard too returned his weapons to the gun room, and then came back.

Feeling weak-kneed, Angelique clutched the stair banister. Richard grasped her arm. "Are you goint to faint?"

She managed to smile. "I had better not, had I? We have people to see to."

Together they went to Mrs. Claybourne's door. Angelique knocked and called. At last the woman opened the door, still almost speechless with fright. She recovered enough, though, to accompany them to her daughter's room, where they found Carrie cowering in terror with the young maidservant who, because there was still a chance of the child's relapse, had been assigned to sleep in what had been the elder daughter's room, with the door to Carrie's room left open. After that they looked in on the boys, whom Dr. Dalrymple had pronounced convalescent only two days before, and found that they too had chosen to huddle in one room, together with the young quadroon manservant who had been assigned to care for them.

By that time Mrs. Claybourne was in sufficient command of herself to say to the manservant, "I will stay with Mr. William and Mr. Roger, Reuben. You go back to the cabins and see if everything is all right there." She turned to Richard and Angelique. "Could you go downstairs and see if there is much damage? I heard such terrible sounds."

On the ground floor Richard and Angelique inspected the front door. The slaves had chopped a hole in it large enough that they could reach through and draw the bolts back. They also had shattered windows in both the drawing room and library. A few ornaments—vases and bowls and a china clock—had been broken, and in the hall a mahogany table had been gashed with a hatchet or ax. That, though, seemed to be the extent of the damage.

As they moved back along the hall, Angelique said, "They must have been mad to attempt this. How could they hope to succeed?"

"You are wrong, Angelique. There was nothing insane about their attempt. With this house stricken by fever, they had an excellent chance of breaking into the gun room before

we were even aware they were in the house. There are weapons of various sorts in there to arm more than twenty men. They could have left this house in flames, gone to another plantation, raided its gun room, and persuaded more slaves to join them. Perhaps among the slaves here tonight there was a man capable of really big dreams."

She looked at him questioningly. He said, "Perhaps a dream of marching eventually to Newport News, and commandeering a ship there, and sailing back to the land they or their ancestors came from." He smiled wryly. "Guns are magic wands that sometimes can make even the wildest or most terrible dreams come true. But without guns, what are they? Just a group of black men stumbling through the night, aware that in a few hours bloodhounds and mounted men will be after them. They really don't have much of a chance."

Angelique shuddered.

They went down the narrow corridor to the side door. It was still bolted. Perhaps because they had hoped to find the front door unbolted, the slaves apparently had not even tried to force this door.

Richard pulled back the bolt and they both stepped out into the night. The overseer's house was still burning. In fact, it was burning more brightly now, with twisting flames now and then visible above the tops of the trees.

Her heart seemed to surge into her throat. Those flames were not from Halloran's house. They were from the cottage where, probably, Jacques still lay in laudanum-induced slumber.

With a smothered scream she started across the lawn. Richard must have realized at almost the same moment that the cottage was on fire, because he ran past her and plunged into the path through the woods. She followed as swiftly as she could. Pictures surged through her mind. Those enraged and baffled black men, pausing for a few moments before they fled the plantation to enter that unguarded cottage, dump the contents of oil lamps onto the floor, and strike a flint from the box on the mantelpiece. But had they first surged up the box staircase where the sleeping man lay, and with a hatchet . . . ?

She burst through the last line of trees around the clearing, then halted abruptly. With despair she realized that there was

no chance of getting Jacques out, even if he were still alive. Flames shot out the open front door and from all the windows, both upstairs and downstairs. Even from this distance she could feel the withering heat.

And then, with an even more agonized terror, she saw that Richard was running toward the cottage, a tall dark shape against the twisting red-gold flames. She screamed, "Richard! Don't! Don't! Come back!"

But he had disappeared beyond the rectangle of seething flame that marked the doorway. She stood there, numb and paralyzed with anguish, knowing in this final moment the truth about herself. Much as she respected Jacques, and great as were her reasons for feeling bitter toward her husband, she would rather that Jacques die ten times over than that Richard die once.

She stood there, willing herself not to crumple into unconsciousness. Through the crackle of flames she heard a faint roaring sound, and knew that it was the surge of her own heartbeats.

A dark shape there in the flame-filled doorway. No, two shapes. A tall man carrying another man in his arms.

Careless of the heat, she moved toward the man moving at a staggered run with his burden. She could see other flames now, tiny ones, spurting from Richard's arms and shoulders and from the clothes of the man in his arms.

Richard placed Jacques on the ground, knelt, and began beating out the flames which licked over the other man's clothing. Angelique also dropped to her knees. With frantic hands she beat at the flames on Richard's shoulders and arms, on Jacques's legs.

She panted, "Is he . . . ?"

"I think he's alive. I think I heard him moan when I picked him up." He lifted Jacques, struggled to his feet. "We must get him to the house."

With Richard in the lead, they moved swiftly along the path and across the lawn. As they neared the light spilling from the open side door, he said sharply, "Don't come in! Not yet!"

She halted. With his burden he went into the house. She thought numbly: He doesn't want me to see Jacques in the light.

Apparently Richard had caught sight of the young quadroon, because she heard him call out, "Reuben, come help me." Then: "Please open this door for me." A door opened and closed. She could tell by the sound that it was the door to the bedroom she had shared with Jacques.

She went inside, passed the closed door, and stood leaning against the wall. No sound now. It was as if the whole stricken household—the still desperately ill, the convalescent, and those caring for them—had fallen into exhausted slumber.

At last that bedroom door opened. She heard Richard say in a dull voice, "Just stay in there for a while." Then he came out and leaned against the wall opposite her.

"He's dead." He looked at her haggardly. "Goddammit, he's dead. Maybe he wasn't alive even when I picked him up."

Her heart twisted with grief for the man who had loved her. After several moments she was able to say, "You tried."

He said, as if she had not spoken, "You will never know how much I wanted to save him for you. He had made you happy. That was something I had not done. But if I had saved him, then I would have been able to think for the rest of my life: I was able to do something fine for her, after all."

Her throat ached. She wanted so very much to say: You can still do something for me. We can do something for each other. After the pain of this night has healed, we will have years and years to make each other happy, years and years to learn to love each other in a new and better way, not only with passion but also with gentleness and understanding.

With that hard ache in her throat, though, she was unable to say anything at all. And so instead she moved closer to the tall man who stood slumped against the wall, his head drooping. He straightened. For a long moment his brown eyes looked down at her, at first with dull suffering, then with a kind of dawning hope.

He said in a constricted voice, "Angelique?"

Tears were spilling down her cheeks now, but she managed to nod and to give him an unsteady smile.

For a second or two longer he looked down at her. Then his arms went around her, drawing her close to his body, which was so much thinner than it had been weeks before.

She knew then that there would never be any real need to speak of what was in her heart at this moment. Her lips, trembling beneath the warm pressure of his lips, were telling him all of it, without any need for words.